

MEET THE MOMS...WHERE ARE THE DADS? WHERE IS THE CHURCH?

Critique of *The Mom Factor*, by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend have co-authored several best selling psychology books. One of their recent efforts focuses on the ongoing role of mothers in the lives of their children, even well into adult years. Early in the book, they state that "mothering is the most significant, demanding, and underpaid profession around...yet, for many, mom also means conflicts or problems," either "haunting memories of bad experiences in the past," or "a difficult present connection" (7). The authors suggest that you, the reader, may be asking yourself certain questions, such as:

"What went right and wrong in my mothering, and how did that affect the connection between my childhood and my life today? How can I get beyond my past mothering problems, so that I can get on with my life?" (7)

Note the underlying assumption that indeed there *is* a connection between one's mothering experience and current adult life. That assumption needs examination and challenge. Meanwhile, the authors make a rather astounding statistical claim:

"Every six seconds, another adult alternates between resentment, anger, guilt, fear, and confusion about ongoing interaction with a mother." (12)

Where did the authors get this statistic? It is cited as if etched in stone, but there is no citation to tell us where they retrieved this information. Most likely, it is speculation grounded in the preconceived ideas they bring into their counseling practice.

There are six "mom" types described in the book. Each "mom" has a chapter of description, followed by a second chapter to give the reader "steps to meeting needs that were unmet and repairing whatever was broken" (8). The authors want to look at "two very important issues," namely "leftover feelings" and "patterns of relating that we learned in our relationship with mom" (16). As they begin, they inform the reader of three assumptions they claim to make throughout the book:

"Our first assumption is that there is no such thing as the 'good child' and the 'bad mom'...adult children need to shoulder much of the responsibility...your responsibility is to grieve and forgive." (21) Then, they claim, "you will be able to receive what you did not get, gain control, and

change those areas where life has not worked for you thus far." (21)

"Our second assumption is that there are preordained tasks of mothering and responses to mothering." (21)

"Our third assumption is that you need love and limits along each step." (21)

It is true that adult children need to assume responsibility rather than to shift blame, and that God has given parents (mothers *and fathers*) important responsibilities. However, the assumptions running through this book could better be described in other terms. First, there is a strong, Freudian flavored determinism. The authors assume far more than a mere "mom factor." They assume a *drastic* impact that invades all of life, including the adult child's relationship with God, that can only be reversed through equally drastic efforts, primarily psychotherapy. They further assume that unmet "needs," needs which should have been met by one's mother, *must* be met in some other manner before it is possible to live rightly. In this emphasis, the roles of the father and the church are minimized into obscurity, as if the mother could bear the entire responsibility for a child's future apart from other God-ordained relationships. Finally, they assume much about the nature of man, particularly in splitting the inner man into a number of vaguely defined "parts." This "splitting" is utilized to explain away a multitude of sin. After we "meet the moms," we will look closely at each of these primary problems.

Meet the Moms

The authors propose six different mothering styles that result in various problems later in life. Before proceeding further, let's meet and describe each of these.

The "Phantom" Mom. The "phantom mom" is described as "detached and absent" as well as "emotionally unavailable" (24). The authors connect this type of mother with broken relationships and depression (24). This mothering style may involve actual abuse, "control issues that block true connection," perfectionistic demands, abandonment, problems in the mother's own life, and overreaction that drives the child away (25).

The "China Doll" Mom. In a word, this mother is fragile and easily overwhelmed by the demands of mothering:

"As a china doll is brittle and easily damaged, the China Doll Mom is often unable to deal with unpleasant or stressful situations in life. This mother has difficulty setting

limits and controlling herself and her environment. She is unprepared to handle the adult world, especially the mothering part of her life. This translates then to her mothering style; she is as overwhelmed with her child's problems as she is with her own.... Though she loves her child, the China Doll Mom becomes quickly overwhelmed with his panic, rage, sadness, and fear. The strength of these feelings frightens her, and she feels at a loss to deal with them." (57)

Here are ways that the "china doll mom" handles her feelings: catastrophizing the child's feelings (57), emotional withdrawal (57), overidentifying with the child's painful emotions (57), regressing to childish behaviors (58), smothering (58), shaming (58), and reacting in anger (58).

The "Controlling" Mom. In discussing this type of mother, the authors focus on the child's "need" for "becoming an individual in her own right" (90), to become a separate person. A controlling mother may use guilt messages or may withdraw her love, financial support, attention, and/or encouragement in order to attack her child's attempts at independence (98). She might also go into a rage when her children disagree with her (99). She blocks the child's growth and encourages him to remain dependent on her:

"Problems arise when a Controlling Mom has difficulties saying no to the regressive drive. Sometimes the mother feels it is mean to do so. Sometimes, she simply enjoys the dependency of the child; it counteracts her aloneness. This often happens when mom feels lonely in her marriage. She uses the child to fill in the gap. Sometimes this mother has unmet dependencies in herself, and she projects these onto her child when the child is actually independent and safe." (96)

Control may also be exerted through what these authors call "enabling," coupled with a lack of structure. They explain that lack of structure is an "enemy to the separation process" (99).

"Children with absent or loose parenting do not get the love and structure they need while developing their independence." (99)

The mother who "enables" is one who stands in the path of natural consequences that would help the child learn:

"The enabling mother cannot allow her child to experience consequences in life. The very consequences that would cause the child to finally grow up and become responsible are

blocked by the loving mother who cannot see her child in pain." (107)

The "Trophy" Mom. The chapter about this mother-child relationship is built on "the basic human need to be *accepted in all our parts*" (127). Loving the "whole person," good and bad, is contrasted with "admiration," being impressed by a person's good points:

"Admiration places the other on a pedestal. But, as it does so, it also puts distance between the two people." (134)

A mother's love of the "whole child" is protection from "an addiction to praise and strokes that he often fails to gain in the real world" (134). The "trophy mom," however, fails to accept the "whole child."

Two equally destructive approaches are described. One is the denial of a child's bad parts (134), the other a destructive, judgmental attitude of condemnation (135). In the first approach, the child "is forced to deny some realities about himself" (134), where in the second, he "internalizes this wrath and feels condemned every time this part of him emerges" (135). The "trophy mom," initially, is one who chooses the first alternative. Often, she continues to desire that her child "make her proud" (139). The relationship may well deteriorate when the mother can no longer deny the reality of her child's failures and struggles in adult life:

"So the adult child remains the 'bad' kid forever, even until late adulthood. It becomes impossible to reconcile who he is with who mom intended him to be." (140)

The authors thus picture the "trophy mom" as one who sees her child as "all good" but may later switch to seeing him as "all bad."

"Still the Boss" Mom. At first glance this mothering style appears similar to the "controlling" mom, but the authors make a distinction, stating that:

"...the Controlling Mom [discussed earlier] injures the essence of the personality of the child while the Still-the-Boss Mom injures the child's ability to become an autonomous, functioning adult." (159)

Issues surrounding the "controlling" mom involve becoming a *separate* person, while those related to "still-the-boss" mom concern becoming an *equal* person. The chapters about this type of mother center on the development of autonomy and even rebellion.

While it is true that children must grow into adults and assume the responsibility that accompanies adulthood, the authors tend to minimize the gravity of sin when they encourage an attitude of rebellion. In teaching children to think and exercise discernment, the solid anchor of God's eternal Word is absolutely crucial, but these psychologists don't mention it.

The "American Express" mom. You've heard the American Express commercial slogan: "Don't leave home without it." The authors explain that adult children must leave their mothers in the sense of no longer continuing to be governed by them:

"They give us life, and then we take that life away from them and move on. That is the eternal dance, to cleave and to leave." (189)

To leave home, according to these authors, means that "we establish our adulthood apart from her [mother's] psychological domain" (191). The "American Express" mom is one who fights against this "leaving" process that begins in adolescence (191ff).

"Mother's role is to allow and encourage the teen's separateness and independence while at the same time setting limits on her child's regressive wish to be taken care of. Problems arise when mom thwarts the independence of the teen by either sabotaging his separateness or giving him too much so that he doesn't have to learn the work ethic." (195)

We have met the moms. Some apparently abandon or misunderstand their responsibilities (the "phantom," "china doll," and "trophy"), while others take their mothering role to extremes (the "controlling," "still-the-boss," and "American Express"). *There is real sin involved in each of these scenarios.* This critique is not intended to condone any of these mothering styles as being biblically valid, but rather to examine and expose some of the conclusions the authors draw as well as their underlying, unbiblical presuppositions. Sinful mothering is not the *cause* of sinful adult lifestyles. The authors *assume* a cause-effect relationship, but they cannot prove it (especially not from Scripture!). Furthermore, "remothering" is not a prerequisite to godly living. Mothers can do two things in reading this critique. First, they can examine their *biblical* responsibilities before God, rather than the enormous psychological tasks posed by these authors. Second, they can be assured of God's grace and sovereignty, knowing that they are not the *cause* of all the sins of their children.

Results or Responses?

Each mothering style is accompanied by elaborate descriptions of its *results* in terms of current relationships, functioning, emotions, and patterns of behavior. At the outset, these psychologically oriented authors draw the reader into their pattern of reasoning:

"We have seen so many people struggle for so long **because** they had no way to understand what to do about how they were mothered, for better or worse." (8, emphasis added)

How are they so certain that such struggles are *because* of the way people were mothered? Have they considered other contributing factors? Yet, according to these authors, mothering "**drastically** impacts all areas of your life" (12, emphasis added). Influence? Yes. But *drastic* impact? Not necessarily. But they authors go on to explain this "drastic impact" in terms of "our patterns of intimacy, relating, and separateness," as well as "how to handle failure, troublesome emotions, expectations and ideals, grief and loss" (13). Their psychology attempts to explain a multitude of sins! Quite often, the *same sins* and emotional responses are explained by several *different* types of mothers.

The "results" of each mothering style are explained in terms of "leftover feelings" as well as "patterns of relating" to God and others. For example, in the early pages of the book they describe the "leftover feelings" of one man they counseled:

"As Jim's attachment to his wife increased, his unresolved feelings about his mother began to emerge and interfere with how he experienced Debbie [his wife]. His anger toward his mother and his feelings of being controlled, mistrusted, and dominated by his mother got displaced onto Debbie." (17)

The authors use a Freudian term, "transference," for this phenomenon. They define that term as "our tendency to direct feelings toward people in the present that should really be directed toward people in our past" (17). Not only is this not helpful, it impedes our understanding of sin. Rather than looking at this husband's biblical responsibility toward his wife, as seen in Ephesians 5 and elsewhere, the authors look back to his mother to place the blame for his present sinful actions.

"Patterns of relating that we learned in our relationship with mom" (17) are another major concern throughout the book. People do learn many things from their parents, including how to relate to others. If the authors left it here, and pursued biblical answers for handling present relationships, we might follow them. However, they propose such deeply ingrained

"patterns" that only an intensive path down the psychotherapeutic road can unravel the "patterns." The authors have this to say in explaining the behavior of one of their counselees:

"Dave is living out the *pattern of feeling* that is familiar to him, and until he changes it, he will continue to 'walk in the ways of [his] elders.' The Bible tells us that we repeat unhealthy patterns of relating until we take ownership of them and work through them (see Mark 7:8-9)." (18)

Is this really what the Bible says in Mark 7:8-9? Absolutely not! This passage contrasts the traditions of men with the commandments of God, rebuking those who gave funds to the church--to be seen as "righteous" by others--that should have been used for the care of their families. The "traditions of men" distort God's Word and actually violate His commandments. This Scripture is not a reference to what psychologists would consider "unhealthy patterns of relating," nor an exhortation to "work through them." It is about *ungodly* ways of treating others, which are to be put off as we put on godly behaviors. As the authors proceed with their discussion, their determinism becomes apparent:

"Patterns of avoidance, control, compliance, dominance, passivity, aggressiveness and overcontrol, mistrust, and a host of others can get **hardwired into our brains**. We were made to take in those patterns and to live by them. That is what parenting is about. We internalize the ways of our parents, and then live by them. Thus, we are **destined** to repeat troublesome internalized patterns of relating or performing until we become aware of them and change." (18, emphasis added)

Is this really what parenting is about? Are we truly "destined" to repeat such patterns of *sin*? Are sins "hardwired into our brains"? This sounds more like an advertisement for psychotherapy than a statement of biblical truth.

Need theology. This book is permeated with need-driven theology. The authors imply that it is not possible to live a godly life until certain psychological "needs" have been met by either one's own mother or some acceptable substitute. Cloud and Townsend's need theology is well illustrated in one of their sections about the "phantom mom." They believe that there are "five basic needs that **must** be met by a mother" (25, emphasis added).

"These needs are universal and documented by research, clinical experience, people's experiences, **and the Bible**." (27, emphasis added)

But are such "needs" truly documented *by the Bible*?

The first proposed "need" is safety. The authors explain:

"*The child does not have safety inside but danger. Safety can only be found in the mother--or whoever is providing the mothering.... Without this person, the child remains in a state of panic or anxiety, unable to love or learn.*" (25)

Next on the list is nurture:

"A mother's nurture is fuel for the soul.... We were created with needs that go deeper even than our physical need for food. We need the immaterial and spiritual requirements of relationship in order to live." (26)

Third is basic trust, "the ability to invest oneself in a relationship" (26). The authors explain that:

"We **must** first experience many instances of trustworthiness before we can truly trust others. We aren't born trusting; trust is learned.... Trust nurtures our ability to *need* and to *depend*, which allows us to grow and develop relationally. We need to need, and we need to feel comfortable with dependency." (26, emphasis added)

Fourth is "belonging and invitation" (26).

"We all have a need to belong to someone and to something bigger than ourselves. Belonging and love are at the root of our humanness...it is our mother's responsibility to rescue us from alienation and isolation and to usher us into the world of relationship." (26, 27)

This need for love and belonging, according to Cloud and Townsend, must be filled by *another person*:

"The sense of feeling wanted and loved is not an intellectual exercise that we can do for ourselves. It comes through the experience of being invited into relationship with another person." (27)

Finally, the authors assert a need for "someone to love" (27).

"A mother provides someone for the child to love--she is a good 'object of love.' In order to develop emotionally, physically, intellectually, and socially, we need not only *be* loved but *to* love.... If mother is safe, we love her. If

she is not, we either are overwhelmed by isolation or we are filled with hatred." (27)

Only briefly do the authors mention the Bible, which supposedly documents and supports their need-driven theology:

"The Bible tells us to be 'rooted and established in love.'" (27)

This phrase is located in Ephesians 3:17, but nowhere is one's earthly mother to be found in the text. Rather, Paul prays here that believers would be rooted and grounded in love because of the fact that *Christ dwells in their hearts*. This grounding in love is not conditioned on receiving a particular type of mothering, either in childhood or sometime later in life. The authors' emphasis on "needs" being met, as a prerequisite to godly living, is not grounded in Scripture but in the speculations of modern psychologists who rejected the gospel (Freud, Fromm, Erikson, et al).

Results. The authors talk about "the kind of mothering we had" as well as "our response to the mothering process" (20). They claim that:

"When we have gotten negative mothering, we can begin a pattern of mistrusting for the rest of our lives." (20)

The authors' emphasis on "needs" leads directly to their proposal of a cause-and-effect relationship between unmet "needs" and adult behaviors. For each mothering style, they elaborate on the "results" in terms of later functioning, relationships, and emotions.

Beginning with the "phantom mom," here are (supposedly) the "results" of being raised by such a mother: shallow relationships, aloofness, withdrawal, mistrust, hostility, aggression, overvaluation of relationship (looking for others to "fill the void"), negative relationships (28-29), autonomy and independence (41). Other functional problems are also described. For example, here is what they say about one man in their counseling program:

"Randy's insecurity **came from** a lack of basic trust at his core. Without a mother's love inside, Randy experienced the world as a hostile and dangerous place." (30, emphasis added)

Note the presumed cause-effect relationship. Emptiness, "one of the most intolerable emotional states known to humanity," is one of the major emotions the authors associate with the "phantom mom" (32). Addictions" are also on the list of results. The authors explain that "as people now think of addiction as a mood-altering

behavior, addiction can certainly have its roots in the search for mother" (32-33). Hopelessness and meaninglessness are also mentioned:

"Hope is one of the most important virtues that can be instilled in the soul.... We develop hope as we experience pain transformed into comfort.... Mothers are crucial to this process." (33)

Moving right along, the authors describe numerous casualties that are claimed to "result" from being raised by a "china doll" mom:

Caretaking: "Do you jump to rescue and enable friends who are having problems? If so, you are most likely trying to manage your own anxiety and sense of frailty, and this 'parenting' of your friends gives you a sense of control over your own unmanageable feelings. This role distracts you from the painfulness of your own strong, scary emotions." (65)

Aggressiveness: "You may be critical of those with feelings, seeing them as weak and irresponsible. When others come to you with a problem, you may be inclined to tell them to 'get their act together' and 'stop whining.'" (65)

Withdrawal: "As a recipient of fragile mothering, you may simply disconnect when you feel anger, fear, or sadness in yourself or sense these emotions in others." (66)

Career snags, such as inability to handle one's workload: "Work, by definition, is pressure; it involves our performance, our competency, and our willingness to take risks.... This kind of pressure brings out strong emotions such as anxiety, anger, and sadness with their catastrophic messages. These feelings can overwhelm us unless we can bring soothing and reality to them." (66)

"Choking" on major decisions, with "little confidence in your decision-making abilities" (66-67).

Also noted are various forms of depression (from emotional isolation or from "giving out" all of your resources) (67), anxiety and panic due to fear of losing love (68), or compulsive-addictive behaviors where some external anesthetic provides a temporary calm (68). The authors also state that other siblings may "fuse with mom's self-victimization" and "unite against the 'black sheep' who is so mean to mother" in order to "displace their own frustration with mom onto a safe target: the child who tries to reconcile honestly" (69).

The child of the "controlling mom" fares no better. Here are some of the relational problems that are claimed to "result" from being raised by a controlling mother: inability to say no (100), attempts to control others through guilt or other manipulation (100), fear of intimacy (100), "codependency" (100-101). Functional problems the authors list include disorganization (101), inability to identify one's own desires and talents (101), inability to delay gratification (102-103), irresponsibility (103). Emotional problems the authors link with controlling mothers: depression related to feeling powerless (103), "learned helplessness" (104), "addictions" resulting from lack of structure (104), isolation (104), anxiety or panic (105), and blaming of others (105). The authors also describe the continuing problems of some of their counselees who struggle to gain a sense of separateness from their mothers in adult life (106). They claim:

"You may have bought this book for just this chapter because it provides the steps to repair the breakdown in the very purpose of mothering: *becoming independent from mom.*" (109)

Next we have the "trophy" mom. The authors describe the "results" of "trophy mothering" (135). In relationships, grown children "are often driven to keep their best foot forward in their relationships," constantly alert for mistakes (135). The concern is not about whether others are hurt, but about being liked by others and avoiding their anger (135). Biblically, this is the *fear of man*.

Much sinful behavior is explained away by a "splitting" of the self into good-bad (more about this later):

"Those who hold out the 'good self' as the only self usually have a dark side to their relational self. They are 'good' with their 'good' friends, but they also have a set of 'bad' friends with whom they can be imperfect and real." (135)

Self-centered narcissism may also result (136). Here the child becomes demanding, constantly seeks to be special and to receive the praise of others (136). There may also be something of an opposite "result," where the grown child constantly flatters others, particularly those who are narcissistic (136). This person "affirms the grandiose self" and "denies the imperfect self" (137). The authors call this the "human mirror," one who "suffers from a disguised form of narcissism" but receives specialness indirectly through the praise of others (137). Perfectionistic tendencies may also emerge (137), as well as the tendency to seek excessive praise in the working environment (137-138). Failures may be hidden or glossed over (138).

Emotionally, adult children of "trophy moms" may become depressed over their failures (138), or may experience anxiety, shame, and guilt while attempting to be perfect (138-139). "Compulsions" and "addictions" may "anesthetize painful realities" (139).

"Many addicts in treatment report that the only time they feel okay without having to be perfect is in the soothing of a substance." (139)

"Still-the-boss" moms have a similar laundry list of "results." First, there is the persistent feeling of inferiority in relation to others, where "the one-down person doesn't feel like an adult in the adult world" (167). This person may blindly follow the lead of others:

"He will often follow authoritative 'guru' types as a way to avoid thinking for himself, and he will strive to win the leader's approval." (168)

Biblically, this is the *fear of man* (again).

The opposite, a "one-up" position, may occur:

"This person [one-up style] has adopted a superior role and aspires to lead and control others. Actually, she also feels one down but compensates with a one-up style of relating. She identifies with the parental role in order to manage her childlike feelings.... These people tend to parent others in their personal relationships. They are huge advice-givers and suggesters." (168)

Another possible response is to become resentful and rebellious toward all authority (168). The authors claim that this, too, is "at heart a one-down relationship" (168). However, they also promote a positive role for such rebellion:

"Developmentally, this can be a sign of progress, as he now has more access to his aggressive energy and can think more independently as he moves into adulthood. Still, he has major relational problems." (169)

This rebellious type of person "opines about the lack of respect and freedom he gets" and is in "a state of perpetual protest" (169). He "defines himself by the parent...he still needs a parent to react to" (169). In summary, one of three things supposedly occurs. The individual may fear disapproval, constantly "parent" others, or simply hate all parents:

"This 'child in an adult's body' often has a problem with follow-through. He may set many good and healthy goals in life, then systematically sabotage them." (169)

Anxiety and depression may occur, accompanied by an inability to live in the world as an adult, "repressed" anger or sexual feelings, heavy guilt over emotions, or failed attempts at pleasing others (170). "Obsessive-compulsive disorders" are explained as attempts "to manage the 'child' parts raging against the 'parental' parts of themselves" (170).

Finally, we have the "American Express" mother. This style is claimed to breed unhealthy relationships of one sort or another:

"Unhealthy dependency creeps into the significant relationships of the 'supposed to be adult' who has had an American Express Mom. Relationships may begin on mutual ground but are quickly jockeyed into some sort of dependency/independency battle.... Those who have not separated from mother will turn significant others into mothers. They will be close to their loved one for awhile and then in some way abandon her.... They avoid intimacy with their significant others." (198)

Some avoid relationships altogether, devalue others "to preserve the fusion with the ideal fantasy of mom," or become "codependent caretakers." (199) There may also be disorganization and irresponsible behavior (199). Emotional problems include depression, helplessness, anxiety, panic, and blaming others (199-200). But beware, say Cloud and Townsend, of "leaving" your "American Express" mom too quickly:

"If mom is still the only one residing within your heart of hearts--the one you still truly depend on--you won't be able to tolerate the tearing and isolation that will occur when you attempt to leave." (205)

The lists presented here are extensive--exhaustive just to read! A close reading reveals that numerous "results" reoccur on the various lists--depression, anxiety, compulsive behaviors, and a variety of sinful behaviors. Since the same traits are repeated in nearly every list, and since all human mothers are sinners, the cause-effect relationship proposed by the authors fails to be convincing.

All of these "results" lead us to conclude that these authors are perpetuating the "victim" mentality that runs rampant through our culture today. There is a short section where the authors

attempt to distance themselves from this type of psychology. They state that:

"Many undefined people feel helpless and powerless in conducting their lives. They feel controlled by the power and threats of others.... *Beware of the tendency to define yourself as a victim, to create an identity out of an event.* You are much more than one event. You are a person with lots of experiences and parts, among which may be a victimizing situation.... Those with victim mentality see no alternatives to their problems. The reality is that most of the time we do have choices." (118)

Nevertheless, their psychological approach is one that cannot logically avoid a heavy focus on the sins of others in the past, thus a "victim mentality." "Unresolved relationships," and past relationships carried "inside our hearts," are claimed to be powerful determinants of present behavior:

"While we do not believe that all personal growth comes from 'digging up the past,' we do believe that we carry around, in the present, feelings and responses to unresolved relationships in our past. In reality, this is not the past-it is the *present*. But we have present feelings about experiences and people in the past, and they can get in the way of present feelings toward present people.... Getting finished with mother from yesterday involves letting go of hurts and whatever else may be dragging us down. Those to whom we have had some attachment are still inside our hearts. And all of our internal attachments have an emotional quality to them, either positive or negative." (80)

The approach that Cloud and Townsend triumph in this book does not differ in substance from the "victim mentality" they claim to critique. The logical conclusion of their approach is illustrated when they explain what can happen when impossibly high demands are not met:

"And then they run to their fantasy person who sees them as wonderful. The affair can meet this need for adoration because it is not lived in day-to-day reality." (241)

This is an unbiblical "explanation" of sexual sin! The psychological road traveled by these authors is one that cannot help but lead to a major shifting of responsibility for sin.

Friendship with Freud. When the authors talk about how parents can help their children in the development of gender roles, they reveal their intimate friendship with Freud, transparently parroting his horrendous Oedipal complex theory:

"The daughter becomes competitive with her mother, as she tests her own power and control. She will tend to be jealous of mom's closeness with dad and want to be his special girl.... The son will, in turn, vie for mom's attention by competing with dad.... Mom's task here is to resist the temptation to make her son more special than her husband."
(164)

The Oedipus complex is an imposition of mythology on human nature, attributing homicidal and adulterous impulses to very young children. It arose from the speculations of an atheist (Freud) who passionately *hated* Christianity. It is a mystery how professing *Christian* authors can dare to import such absurd theories into their counseling.

Relationship with God. In numerous places, the authors presume that an adult child's relationship with God is profoundly impacted by the mothering he experienced in childhood. This determinism in the spiritual realm utterly fails to take account of God's sovereignty, His ability to intervene in any life at any time, regardless of how that person was parented. The authors claim that:

"Our early relationships have a significant impact on our ability to enjoy the spiritual life. They affect our view of God and our ability to integrate spiritual development into the whole of life. Specifically, our relationship with our mother affects our ability to trust and to love and receive love. The way that we experience security, freedom, healthy self-esteem, and a mystical connection with God is strongly influenced by the kind of mothering we received." (31)

Difficulties with God are connected by these authors with their defective mothering styles. The detached "phantom mom" fails to help her child develop trust in God:

"The psalmist said it this way: 'Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother's breasts.' For as long as humankind has been on the earth, we have associated mothering with trust and nurture. Yet many have not received nurture and trust from their mothers. Instead of connecting safety to their mothers, they have found an emptiness and a void." (23)

Another translation of Psalm 22 is also quoted to support the same thesis:

"'Yet you brought me out of the womb, you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.' The idea of trust in God is

connected with learning trust in our earliest relationships.... The two are interrelated." (30)

Cloud and Townsend insist that:

"Those who did not learn to trust at their mother's knee have difficulty trusting God." (31)

The implications here are quite serious, for both mother and child. If all of this is true, then the individual raised by a "phantom mom" has little chance of trusting God--perhaps even of believing the gospel, as trust is an integral aspect of saving faith. The weight placed on the mother is also enormous. But look at the actual text of Scripture (Psalm 22). This psalm rivets the reader forward in time to the cross. The verse cited (22:9) echoes back to the first verse, where we hear the cry of Christ on the cross: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" The psalmist states that *God caused* him to trust *while* on his mother's breasts. It doesn't say that the actions of the mother caused him to trust. Rather, *God* caused him to trust. Furthermore, the prophetic nature of this psalm reveals the speaker to be *Christ*. This is not the psychoanalysis of every man, but a specific messianic prophecy. The psychologists have ripped a verse out of context to support their theory. While mothers can be a helpful or hurtful *influence*, they do not determine the future of their children in the absolute manner posed by these authors.

In looking at the "trophy mom," the authors again propose a predetermined relationship with God. Spiritually, the child of this mother type "often finds it difficult to feel close and safe with God" (139). She may not be "able to imagine a Creator who both knows and loves her," instead seeking to appease God's wrath, hiding in shame (139). Furthermore:

"She can't see the One who has loved her 'with an everlasting love' and accepts her imperfections without judgment or denial. This kind of love simply takes her badness in its raw and unrefined form and gently lays it at the foot of a bloodstained cross." (139)

The child of the "trophy mom" supposedly seeks out those with either very high demands or very low expectations. The authors claim that there is a similar impact on the child's relationship with God:

"These are generally the kinds of misunderstandings we have about God as well. We either view him as a harsh taskmaster who demands perfection, or we see him as the all-loving

grandmother who notices no evil. In reality, God is a God of both grace and truth." (145)

To these psychologists, a person's relationship with God mirrors his relationship with mother. There is a subtle Freudian influence present, as Freud taught that "God" is nothing more than a projection of one's parents, not a *reality*. Although the Bible places serious responsibilities on parents, nowhere does it state that parental relationships have this sort of deterministic effect on one's later relationship with God. The authors, despite their determinism at so many points, give some recognition to this truth:

"God has no grandchildren. Mom can teach, train, and model her relationship with God, but she can't make her child have a relationship with God. This is between God and the child, as each of us must make our own journey to him. *God will ultimately be the child's only parent.*" (162)

In looking at "still-the-boss" mothers, Cloud and Townsend once again make emphatic statements about how this mother influences her child's relationship with God. They claim that some in this camp may "view God in intellectualized black-and-white or legalistic ways," learning "great amounts of doctrine and theology, hoping to relate to him [God] through their heads...too afraid to relate to him with their hearts" (171). They are "unable to accept the mystery of God" and experience great anxiety about the "unknowable parts of God" (171). Their response is to place limitations on God:

"They need to control their relationships. If they can't put God in a box and keep him appeased, they run the risk of making a mistake and incurring his disapproval and wrath." (171)

Do people ever do such things? Yes, and it's called idolatry (Psalm 115). However, Scripture never teaches that a particular type of mother is the factor causing such idolatrous worship.

Even the ability to understand and apply God's Word is supposedly tainted by "still-the-boss" mother, and God is experienced as "a harsh, dictatorial judge" (170).

"They read the Bible through that particular lens, and so the condemnation passages jump out at them. They are unable to recognize the compassion passages. Their relationship with God is based in fear and is dependent on their performance. They don't believe God could ever love them as they are. Though they desire intimacy with God, they can't feel safe with or approved by him." (170)

Whatever happened to the work of the *Holy Spirit* through God's living, eternal Word (Hebrews 4:12-13; Psalm 19:7-8)? Centuries before the advent of modern psychotherapy, Paul petitioned *God* that He might grant strength and knowledge to believers (Ephesians 3:14-21).

The spiritual "grandchild" concept, noted earlier, is mentioned again in connection with the "American Express" mothering style:

"Since the one who has not left home is still a child inside, her relationship with God is more like that of a grandchild than a child.... To be spiritually mature is to achieve true adulthood--true existential responsibility before God as his child, image-bearer, and steward. When we are still tied to mom's apron strings, we answer primarily to her, rather than to God." (200)

Biblically, it is true that there is only one mediator between God and man, namely Jesus Christ. Each individual believer has direct access to God the Father through Him--not through a human mother or any other person. However, this truth has been distorted to fit a psychological theory about the manner in which a mother *determines* her child's relationship with God.

Thoughts and Feelings

The writings of modern psychologists often place an inordinate amount of emphasis on emotions. This book is no exception. Emotions are certainly one aspect of the inner man, and Scripture exhorts us to comfort one another in times of affliction. However, the psychological approach exalts emotions in a manner that conflicts with the Bible.

According to Cloud and Townsend, emotions are particularly intense during childhood and initially revolve around mother:

"During the early years, a child's emotions center around one person: Mom. The child's entire world is wrapped up in his mother, as the source of his life, nurture, and safety." (59)

The authors go even further, proposing that emotions are the very *essence* of a child:

"These primitive, intense feelings are as frightening to the child as they are to his mom. They are out of control, and they get stronger and stronger to the point that the child fears that either he or his mother will be hurt or destroyed

by them. *The child doesn't just have feelings; to a large extent, he is feelings.*" (60)

This view of human nature is nowhere to be found in, or supported by, the Scripture. The Bible exhorts parents to train their children in the ways of the Lord and to teach them God's Word. If children were essentially feelings, as indicated in this quote, surely our Creator would have made this clear to parents in His Word, centuries before modern psychologists entered the scene and began imposing their theories on unsuspecting parents.

The ability to experience painful emotions is held up as a desirable counseling goal. If you haven't "left home," the authors claim, you probably allow little intimacy in your relationships.

"You may have difficulty experiencing painful feelings, being dependent, and revealing your 'bad self' around others. At some level, you reserve these parts for mother." (206)

Contrast this with biblical repentance and confession of sin. Does the Bible promote or condone "revealing your 'bad self'" to others? Where in Scripture are we exhorted to experience painful feelings? What about acknowledging our *sin* (as opposed to "bad self") and taking it to the cross?

Validation. At numerous points, the authors recommend validation of emotions:

"When our emotions are out of control, we need them to be validated; that is, we need someone to experience them with us as real, painful, and scary." (61)

The reader is counseled to "stop the devaluation of your feelings and accept the validation that others give" (78). Validating the emotions of others is also mentioned:

"As we validate others, we are validated. We see how others catastrophize and think negatively. And as we listen to their overwhelming experiences, we become less frightened of our own." (80)

The authors do mention that "validating doesn't mean agreeing with the content of the emotions" (62). While this caution is appreciated, it isn't enough.

Elsewhere, we are given a supposedly scientific explanation of why this "validation" is so important:

"Research has shown that validation of our emotional states is powerful in its ability to help us contain what's inside of us.... As our feelings are validated, our personality structure comes together, and our overwhelming feelings are less apt to escalate." (74)

This sounds like a scientific pronouncement set in stone...but *what* research? These authors frequently cite statistics or research in support of their theories, but they have yet to provide documentation of their sources so that the reader might further evaluate their conclusions.

Moving right along, however, the authors discard *truth* in their promotion of validating emotions:

"They have nothing to do with how true or not true the experience is in reality but how true the feeling and the experience are to us." (75)

Nothing to do with *truth*?

"Structuring" is claimed to follow validation:

"After our feelings have been validated, we can understand them and put them into perspective...we are brought back to reality; we realize that, while important, our feelings are just feelings after all." (75)

Confrontation is important because:

"...there are times when feeling states escalate to a point of being truly out of touch...we need honest friends who will confront us when we are not seeing reality." (76)

At least there is some place for *truth*, finally. But nowhere in their comments about emotions do the authors address the issue of sin. The Bible calls us to weep with those who weep, and to comfort others in their affliction because God has comforted us (2 Corinthians 1). The Psalms are filled with a range of intense emotions. Emotions have a rightful place; we are not lifeless stones. However, emotions must be evaluated in terms of whether they are godly or sinful. The psychological approach merely "validates" all emotions without using God's criteria to determine whether they are righteous or unrighteous. Emotions are seen as something above God's law, and this is wrong.

"Grief work." The "need to grieve" is another topic. The authors explain that:

"When we are faced with our own failings, or others' failings toward us, our first tendency is to try to fix things." (131)

Grief, they claim, is necessary not only in times of loss, but also failure and *sin*:

"In order to deal with and resolve loss, badness, and failure, children need to learn to grieve. Grief is the process of letting go of that which we can't keep. It ultimately enables us to receive that which we can't lose--comforting relationships that sustain and support us in our sadness." (132)

The authors claim that "grief work" involves awareness of your feelings, expression and understanding of those feelings, letting yourself be comforted, and finally, letting go of your feelings (82).

In a fallen world, people do experience much affliction, sadness, and grief. There is a proper place for *comfort* among believers, as we read in the opening chapter of 2 Corinthians. The psychological approach, however, is heavily focused on *self*, on doing "grief work" in therapy, experiencing painful feelings, and such. The Scripture focuses on how we can comfort *others* because God has provided comfort and hope to us.

Thinking. In addition to discussing emotions, the authors do focus some of their attention on our thoughts. However, they teach that emotions are the foundation of how we think:

"The thinking of people without early security rests on the sand--on feelings of being unloved, and feelings of suspicion and lack of trust.... The problem is not with the thinking, but with the lack of love underneath. Insecure people think insecure thoughts." (33)

The various mothering styles are blamed for various problems in our thought processes. For example, rigid thinking supposedly may result from being raised by a "china doll" mom:

"You may be one of those with fragile mothering who reacts against all unmanageable emotions and operates solely in the cognitive sphere." (67)

The child of the "trophy" mom, according to Cloud and Townsend, may engage in distorted thinking which needs to be challenged. This "distorted" thinking, more specifically, is a reference to critical evaluations of oneself and others, as well as a generally pessimistic outlook on life (148).

The authors claim that "we need to *think about our thinking*" (76). They mention thinking that is negative, pessimistic,

paranoid, critical, or self-centered (how about sinful?) (77). Many benefits are claimed for understanding of one's own emotions and thoughts:

"Observation of thinking patterns has been shown to calm people down, change their outlook, make them feel better, give them better impulse control, and help out in many other areas of functioning." (77)

Thus the reader is counseled to observe himself closely:

"Learn to think about feelings and observe yourself.... Find the themes in your negative thinking and challenge those thoughts the way your supportive people do.... You might find it helpful to keep track of your involuntary negative thoughts during the week and then challenge them. Self-talk is an important form of containment." (79)

The Bible has much to say about our thoughts, but we are not counseled to embark on this sort of introspective path. Rather, we are exhorted to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5) and to think about what is true, right, praiseworthy, and so forth (Philippians 4:8-9). The idea of "self-talk" is very deceptive, because our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). What we need is "God-talk," i.e., God's faithful, eternal Word. We are to examine ourselves in accordance with God's standards, not those of modern psychology.

Doctrine of Man: Whole or Sum of Fractions?

A significant, recurring problem throughout this book is the authors' unbiblical division of man into numerous, vaguely defined "parts." Rather than acknowledging the *whole person*, who lives before God and is accountable to Him, these authors divide the inner man. Thus the person becomes a sum of various fractional parts, rather than a *whole person*. This unbiblical doctrine of man is used to explain (excuse) behavior what the Bible calls sin. In fact, the authors' teachings on this issue can easily deceive us into being all too comfortable with our sin, in the name of "integration" of our good and bad "parts":

"For us to become comfortable with ourselves, all of ourselves, we need someone with whom we can be ourselves. We need acceptance and understanding, so that we can contain and integrate all parts of ourselves.... The mothering process of acceptance integrates the child." (19)

Are we truly called, biblically speaking, to be "comfortable with ourselves," or to "integrate" the "parts" of ourselves? No

Scripture suggests this. Rather than "integrating" such "parts," we are exhorted to "put off" the old man, and to "put on" the new man created to be like Christ in holiness, righteousness, and truth (Ephesians 4:22-24).

When focusing on the "china doll mom," the authors tell us that "children have not only immature emotions but also immature parts of their character that need containing." (60) These include "needy" parts as well as weak and autonomous parts:

"Children have all these parts, but they aren't integrated. They don't 'get along with each other.'" (60)

There are also "primitive parts" that the mother can understand so as to "help the child grow up so that he or she functions together without conflict" (61).

In discussing children of the "trophy mom," the authors describe the various "parts" of the self that need acceptance (129). First, there are the "weak parts" (129). The authors claim that "weakness helps us stay connected to God and others" (129). Next are the "negative parts" (129). Children learn to distinguish between good and evil and to "clarify values" (129). Then there are the "mediocre parts" (129):

"Children need to know that they are special even when they aren't special. All children fail or simply don't excel at lots of things." (129)

There are also "the parts mom doesn't like" due to "mom's own issues" or her particular style (130). Finally, the authors describe the "bad parts":

"Some of a child's parts aren't just negative but sinful, covetous, and self-centered. These character traits are destructive in the child, and the child needs help dealing with them." (130)

The mother "doesn't pretend the bad parts aren't there" but also doesn't condemn the child (130). Rather, "she helps her child bring the bad parts to her, to safe people, and to the cross of Christ, where they are forgiven" (130). However, not content with bringing sin to the cross and seeking forgiveness, the authors speak about "our need for integration," i.e., of our "good" parts and "bad" parts (130-131). They state that children "desperately need mom to connect to their hatred as well as their loving feelings" (130). They warn that "when mother insists that her child always be 'positive and loving,' love and hate remain split for the child" (131). *Integration* of "good" and "bad" "parts" of the self is a key element in the theology of these authors:

"We need all of our 'real' traits and characteristics to be connected to the same relational home. We need a person where all these parts can be in one place at one time with one person.... When we feel loved for who we are, we are better equipped to deal with the problems of living in a fallen world." (127)

Love, according to these authors, counteracts "badness":

"Love is the antidote to badness. While imperfection will always exist in the world and within our very being, it doesn't remove us from relationship and connectedness. We are 'okay' in our badness.... When we no longer have to struggle with toxic shame, hiding our true selves, or perfectionism, we can then work on maturing our failing selves. The failing self is no longer starved to death by denial and judgment but receives the grace it needs to grow up." (127)

Furthermore, the authors claim that "Christ accepts all of our weaknesses and foibles...we don't have to clean up our act and be perfect for him to love us" (127-128).

There are major theological problems with this approach. The authors ignore the fact that Scripture proposes no "good parts" to the unregenerate man, although through God's common grace the unbeliever may perform acts that are outwardly righteous. Sin is pervasive, impacting the *entire* man; it is not a matter of "good parts" and "bad parts." Love is not an "antidote" to badness. God *demonstrated* His love by sending Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners, but love, per se, is not the atonement required for sin. Sin (a better term than "badness") required the sacrifice of God's Son to pay the penalty demanded by divine justice. The authors minimize the grave seriousness of sin and its penalty. Furthermore, our sanctification is not a matter of Christ merely "accepting" us with all of our sins. True, we don't have to "clean up our act" before we come to Him. We come in a state of sin, in faith, asking for mercy. But God doesn't leave us there. Rather, through His Spirit and Word He conforms us to the image of His Son. He is like a refining fire. Again, the gravity of sin is minimized, exchanged for a psychological type of acceptance that substitutes for biblical repentance, atonement, and sanctification.

Repentance, meanwhile, is viewed as another part of "getting real." Here is how the authors describe it:

"A big part of ridding ourselves of the ideal demand is to take ownership of our real badness. Our 'badness' becomes

less powerful when we quit denying it or running from it, and we face it directly." (149)

Yes, we need to acknowledge and confess our sin (not "badness") before God. But mere acknowledgment does not make it "less powerful." Aside from the reality of Christ's atonement, it would be even *more powerful*. Yet because of His Person and work, Christ has *broken* the power of sin, so that it no longer rules over the believer (Romans 6:1-14). The work of Christ, not a therapeutic exercise of "taking ownership," makes all the difference in the world.

The authors' unbiblical doctrine of man is also seen when they contrast the "real self" with the "ideal self." Discussing the erroneous ways of "trophy" mothering, they claim that:

"The emotional tone of the relationship between our ideal self and our real self is internalized from our past mothering. We take our Trophy Mom's anger and condemnation into our real self, and it becomes the way we feel about our real self." (148)

The reader is informed that "we rework our ideal; we integrate our real self into our ideal self to become a person of integrity" (147). As the authors describe this process, a biblical view of sin gets lost in the shuffle:

"In the presence of our safe people, we can discover what real humanity is and construct a realistic ideal. We can even begin to value our weakness and helplessness.... We see that it is normal to struggle with temptation, sinfulness, and vulnerability." (147)

The apostle Paul at one point valued his weakness in the sense that it caused him to depend wholly on Christ. The grace of God is made perfect in our weakness. However, these authors go much further. Sin is not "normal." When God created the heavens, the earth, *and man*, He said that it was "very good." Sin entered the world later as an aberration. It isn't "normal," nor is it something to be valued.

A better way to view the "real self" and "ideal self" is to recognize that the "real self" is sinful, always coming short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The "ideal self" is what we will become in the state of glory. However, this is to redefine the authors' terms. Their "ideal self" is constructed by sinful man, according to the standards of self. Biblically, we must consider what Scripture says about the "old man" (unregenerate) in contrast to the "new man" (regenerate). *Salvation* is what makes the crucial difference. Our goal in sanctification is to become more

like Christ, not to integrate a "real self" with an "ideal self" constructed by our own imaginations.

Still another problem emerging from this fractionalized view of man is the separation of self from self. Speaking about the person raised by a "phantom mom," the authors claim that:

"In a very real sense, this chapter is about finding a new home for the lost part of your soul. That part of you that never finished learning to attach, connect, and trust is still alive and waiting to be developed and mothered." (41-42)

Man is separated from *God* by sin, not from *self* by the sins of an earthly mother.

The serious error of this fractionalized "parts" approach is nowhere more evident than in one of the closing chapters, "For Men Only." The logical conclusion to the authors' psychologized theology is clearly demonstrated. Initially, they claim that:

"Men are very good at leaving mother issues unresolved. Too often mothers have enabled this pattern, or a woman can be found who will." (243)

The authors counsel their male reader to "be all of yourself with women," or you will "be different parts of yourself with different women" (244). They call this "splitting" and give several examples:

Love-sex split: "Some men have women they love and other women they act or feel sexual toward.... So, a husband may love his wife but have an affair." (244) [This is love?!]

Fusion-unavailable split: Men "who cannot get their boundaries together" may "fuse with a woman who loves them and long for a woman who does not" (244). They become "compliant and codependent" but "lose their passion" (244).

Use one-respect another: This is where one woman meets a man's "selfish needs" (the "used" woman) while he "respects and adores" another (245). "Typically, the used woman has limited boundaries and self-respect and does not require him to respect her." (245)

Moral-immoral: Some men "are still hiding their 'bad boy' side in shame from mom" (245). "They may respect a wife with their moral side and have an affair where they let their

'badness' show. Many religious leaders who have affairs are in this kind of good boy/bad boy split." (245)

Their answer? "The answer to splitting is to learn to be *all* of yourself with women" (245). Biblically, however, what they have so vividly described is *sin*. The explanations offered above, along with the recommended solution, bypass the whole concept of sin. Nowhere do they mention repentance or the fact that these behaviors are the transgression of God's law. Thus their answers are psychologically tainted substitutes for the atonement that Christ has provided. This is theologically irresponsible counsel, particularly when offered by professing Christians who occasionally toss in a few brief words about the Person and work of Christ after having first saturated readers with their psychologized explanations of sin.

Back to Bible: Who is Responsible for What? Mothers, Children, "Support Groups"

The authors do not deny the whole idea of personal responsibility. In fact, they have a great deal to say about the responsibilities of both mothers and their adult children, as well as others. However, their concept of "responsibility" is one that revolves around the meeting of what they presume to be psychological "needs," rather than honoring God and living according to His Word. The biblical role of the church is both minimized and distorted, while little is said about the father, who is the *head* of the home.

Responsibilities of mother. The responsibilities of a mother are defined largely in terms of meeting various psychological "needs" rather than in teaching her children the ways of the Lord.

In discussing the deficiencies of each mothering style, there is information about what the authors consider the key responsibilities of mothers. The "china doll" mom fails in her responsibility to "contain" the emotions of "parts" of her children. This "containing" includes soothing ("exchanging" of scary feelings for calmness and love), validation of emotions, structuring (putting feelings in perspective), and confrontation--not of sin, but of out-of-control emotions (61-64). Note how these "responsibilities" revolve around emotions. Nothing about God's Word.

Failed responsibilities of the "controlling" mom are discussed in terms of allowing a child to develop a distinct identity, separate from the mother:

"But if the child is not allowed to be different or to make her own choices, then her identity itself is deemed 'not okay.' Who she is is not okay. And a child will either fight to have her own identity, or give in passively to not having one at all." (92)

There is some recognition given to law and morality, but the primary focus is individual identity:

"The trick is to maintain a balance between the boundaries of society, the law, our own culture, safety, morality, and the freedom to be an individual." (93)

Once again, nothing is said about God's law, only "morality."

The authors caution that although a mother must set boundaries, "she must resist enforcing limits only to keep her child from being different from her" (93). *What about enforcing limits in order to live according to God's Word?* The authors also talk about discipline, rules and consequences for unacceptable behavior that harms others:

"A child is an individual, but a child is not God. A child is a person, but other persons in the world deserve respect also." (93)

Rather than leaving all discipline to the father, Cloud and Townsend encourage the mother's active participation:

"But it is very important for a mother to discipline her child so that he learns relational values as well. If mother can be walked on, the child never learns to respect his love objects." (94)

Note the objective: "relational values." Does this mean that the father *does not* teach his children how to relate to others in a godly manner? Also, where are *God's* standards in all of this?

The authors do speak of self-control, a godly quality that Galatians 5 lists as a fruit of Spirit. When children are properly disciplined, the authors say, "they learn the important task of ownership--what it means to own their own feelings, choices, behaviors, and attitudes, and take responsibility for them. In doing so, they learn self-control" (95). Self-control is a biblical quality, but it isn't mere "ownership" of feelings and choices. Dissecting the error here is not an easy task, but a few paragraphs later it becomes more apparent:

"If these aspects of separateness and will are developed through mother's structuring of limits and discipline,

children can learn some important realities. They learn that they have a life and that it is their God-given design to express that life assertively.... They learn that they are in control of their own lives and that the quality of their life is their responsibility, not somebody else's." (96)

Yes, we are each responsible for our actions. However, we are responsible *before God*. He is in control and working all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11). The life of the believer belongs to *God*, not to self to "express that life assertively." The quality of our own life is not a primary biblical goal; rather, we are to serve Christ and His kingdom. In spite of some good emphasis on personal responsibility, there is still a consuming focus on self that contrasts with Scripture.

The "trophy" mom, according to the authors, fails in her responsibility to fully accept her child:

"The word *accept* in the Bible also means *receive*. When a mother accepts her child, she actually receives into herself all of her child's parts.... She bears what her child cannot yet bear." (128)

However, this doesn't mean that the mother *approves* of all of her child's behaviors (128). She must also "gradually humble the child to give up his godlike wishes" (128). She accepts and even encourages her child's weakness:

"In a very real sense, children are weakness.... The good mother baptizes her children's weakness. She welcomes their needs, has compassion on their frailties, and connects with them emotionally." (129)

As noted earlier, these authors believe that each person is composed of a "real me" plus an "ideal me" (132). The accepting mother, they say, "loves the real self more than the ideal self" in her child (132). But "when a mother makes the fatal mistake of loving the ideal over the real, of preferring the child who 'should be,' the child does the same to himself." (132)

Some of the problems with this view can be seen in the previous section, where we discussed the authors' splitting of the individual into "parts." While certainly a mother cannot expect perfection, and must know that her child will sin and need correction, the authors' view is one that minimizes the seriousness of sin. There is a real mixture here, with some truth about teaching humility and continuing to *love* the child when he sins, plus some error in the tendency to be *too* accepting of what the Bible calls sin.

The chapters centering on "still the boss" mom emphasize the responsibility to prepare children for functioning as adults:

"A good mother does more than nurture her child. She also looks at her child through the lens of the future. That is, she constantly *sees the potential adult in this child* and behaves in a manner that elicits the grown-up from out of the kid.... The emphasis in this chapter is on the mother's responsibility to develop the child's emerging adult functions and abilities that will prepare him for life in the adult world." (159)

One initial concern here is the assumption that there is an "inner adult" to be drawn out of the child. (This is an interesting corollary of the popular view of an "inner child" in the adult!) Children, like adults, are human beings made in the image of God, so there is an essential similarity of being. However, nowhere does Scripture suggest that there is an "adult" inside the child or a "child" inside the adult person.

Continuing discussion of this mothering style revolves around issues of authority. The authors explain that "God has created an authority structure from himself on down. *Authority* means 'expertise' or 'power'" (160). They go on to tell us that mothers are to help their children "move into their place in the world of authority" (160). This, they say, involves encouraging a child "to question her decisions and values" because "you can only become a peer with other adults if you can learn to challenge the thinking of your authority figures" (160). "Teaching core values" is noted as a parental responsibility (161), with the warning that "mom must teach her child to think for himself" (162). This includes learning how to search out answers for questions, as well as engaging in critical thinking, evaluating a matter and asking "why" (162). Submission, however, is also a key part of the process:

"Mother teaches her child submission to authority by her own submission to the rules of life.... She sets house rules and expects them to be obeyed. At the same time, the good mother gradually and progressively allows her child more and more authority and responsibility." (161)

There is *some* truth in all of this. God has indeed established authority--in the family, the church, the state. Submission to properly ordained authority is taught in the Bible, but at the same time, individual believers need to develop biblical discernment and not obey human authority without question. Unfortunately, these authors do not emphasize the importance of learning to evaluate human authority *according to the standards of Scripture*. They merely leave it to the individual--sinful as he

may be--to "think for himself." This is dangerous, leading to a sinful autonomy and rebellion. The authors fail to maintain a biblical view of the gravity of sin, here as well as many other places.

Development of talents is another parental responsibility the authors discuss in connection with "still-the-boss" mom. Mothers can provide opportunities for their children to discover their natural abilities:

"The child wants to make mom happy. But what he really needs is a mom who is happy that her child is developing talents that he himself values.... They [parents] are to encourage the child's real, inborn talents, and at the same time not discourage the child by forcing him to give his life to something for which he has not yet developed the gifts."
(163)

There is nothing wrong with helping a child discover and develop his God-given talents. However, this recommendation would be vastly improved by focusing on the use of talents for the glory of God, rather than merely what the child values.

The authors also recommend that "still-the-boss" mothers need to assist their children in developing friendships outside the family, "though they are the same ones he will use to eventually leave her" (165). Meanwhile, the mother "must change along with her child's needs from parenting by *control* to parenting by *influence*.... At this stage mom must evaluate everything she does with her teen in the light of *leaving*" (166). The authors caution that:

"Mother needs tremendous inner resources during these years. She must be secure enough in her opinions that disagreement with her is stimulating, not frightening." (166)

We can agree that friendships outside the family are important and desirable. However, the *focus* in this area needs further evaluation. Children need friendships in the family of God to help them grow and become a part of the body of Christ. They also need to learn how to develop friendships outside the church, in order to be a light in a dark world, to be a witness for Christ. The focus, biblically, is not so much on "leaving home" per se, but rather on biblical relationships that build the kingdom of God.

The "American Express mom" discussion brings out, again, the matter of leaving home to become independent adults:

"Children must leave their parents in the *governmental* sense in order to be full-fledged adults.... The good guardian and manager gradually delegates this freedom. This is not to be confused with geography or other symbols of space; an adult child can live a thousand miles from mother and not have emotionally left home." (191)

The authors describe "leaving home" in terms of an actual *abandonment* of one's mother. In late adolescence and early adulthood:

"...the essential reality is that mom gets *abandoned*. As the book of Genesis puts it, a man shall *leave* his mother. The Hebrew word for *leave* means 'abandon, refuse, loose, forsake, neglect, set free,' among others.... This process of leaving mother emotionally is the final developmental step for the child, enabling him to make a full commitment to adulthood.... The first separation from mother, a physical one, is called *weaning* in the Bible.... The second separation--leaving home--has been described as the wounding of mother, which every child eventually does." (196)

There is some truth here in that Scripture exhorts man to leave his parents and cleave to his wife. But did we really need modern psychologists to tell us what God commanded at the beginning of time? Furthermore, the Bible does not describe leaving and cleaving in the modern psychological terms of "wounding" or "abandonment" of parents.

Another concern expressed is related to teaching children that mother is not the sole source of truth:

"...if mom gives her child the message that she is the only source of love and truth, the child never learns to move past her. This then sets up a developmental issue--the child clings to others in a childlike dependent fashion instead of relating to them from a place of healthy adult interdependency. When we are able to move away from maternal dependency, we can develop the ability to lean on others in a more responsible way. We begin to realize that we are responsible to get our needs met instead of waiting for our mother to anticipate and take care of them." (193)

According to the authors, mothers must allow their children to experience the authority and rules of the outside world:

"If mom can stay out of the way of the outside world's limits, the child learns an important reality: *Parents are not the only ones with rules*.... Unfortunately, some mothers cannot let their children suffer." (194)

Something is radically missing here! True, mothers are not the only source of truth, and the world outside has its rules. However, *biblically*, parents are to instruct children in the law of the Lord, teaching them that God's Word is the source of eternal, absolute truth. The Bible, in turn, informs us about the authority structures ordained by God, and what allegiance we owe to them. The authors have not handled this issue from a truly biblical perspective.

In one of the closing chapters, the authors counsel mothers to be willing to acknowledge their own sin to their children. While this sounds like a promising biblical emphasis, it is riddled with errors. For example, the authors claim to know the *motives* of mothers who refuse to admit their mistakes:

"Moms would like to protect their child from the knowledge that they are imperfect sinners. Some mothers hide their failings to protect their own sense of entitlement, specialness, and self-esteem. But most hide because they fear the information will injure the child at some level."
(228)

How do they know the motives and intents of the heart (this is God's responsibility!) with such confidence? Ever since the fall, sinful man has attempted to conceal his sin, to hide from a holy, righteous God. Mothers today are no different.

The authors express a similar thought when they state that you should "take responsibility for your own badness" (228). (The term "badness" is repeatedly used instead of *sin*!) Otherwise, they warn:

"Taking on mom's badness causes all sorts of character and emotional problems in later years for children, such as isolation, guilt, masochism, and seeking out destructive relationships." (228)

But do children really "take on mom's badness"? Where in Scripture can this notion be supported? In view of biblical teachings about human nature--our tendency to conceal our sin--wherever do these authors get the idea that a child assumes the sins of his mother? Not from the Bible!

Although the authors shift much blame to mothers, they also shift blame away from her to people such as her own parents. For example, here is the explanation they provide for a "trophy" mom who fails to love the "real self" of her child:

"Mom was probably not a villain. She most likely did not reject your real self just because she felt like it. She was probably under her own ideal self demands from her own mother or someone else who was significant to her." (152)

Similar shifting of blame occurs in discussions of the "controlling" mother:

"While it's easy to resent mother's control, it's more difficult to see her as someone who has also been hurt in the area of boundaries. Most enmeshing moms were abandoned or controlled themselves." (121)

The authors continue to shift responsibility backwards in time, as they explain what may have happened to the "phantom mom" earlier in her life:

"She lacked the connection and nurture she needed as a child." (34)

"She was abandoned or hurt in the past and was unable to allow herself to attach deeply to anyone, even her own child." (34)

Etc.!!

There is a *brief* attempt to recognize the mother's individual responsibility for her actions:

"Another possible answer to why your mother couldn't be all that you needed her to be is that she chose the selfish path.... No matter what was done or not done to your mother, she is still responsible for how she responds to the truth.... Children are used only as objects to meet their needs." (35)

Where shifting of blame is pushed further and further into the past, blaming parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, eventually we are back to Adam and Eve. There is a fleeting recognition of the fallacy inherent in such reasoning:

"Ever since Adam and Eve, we have been blamers at heart, but good mothers discipline it out of us instead of joining in the blame. In this way they make sure that the child does not grow up with a victim mentality but becomes a responsible person." (105)

Unfortunately, the entire thrust of this book is to shift blame backwards in time. This quote is also deficient in that parents do much more than to discipline blaming "out of us." Parents are

responsible to instruct their children in the Word of God, in living to glorify Him rather than self. When Cloud and Townsend do discuss the positive responsibilities of mothering, their focus is on getting psychological needs met rather than training children to live according to the law of the Lord.

Responsibilities of self. The authors appear to depart from the blame-shifting approach of so much modern psychology when they state that:

"Our life is our own now, and *we alone are accountable for its outcome*: 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.'" (46)

The key problem, however, emerges in the opening phrase above. Biblically, our life is *not our own* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), but rather belongs to God. Responsibility for oneself is described by these authors primarily in terms of *getting psychological needs met*, rather than honoring God and living according to His commandments:

"...when it's time to get certain needs met, we can't go back to mom and ask her to remother us. Our growth isn't her job anymore, it's ours." (42)

"If you are still going to mom for things you should be providing for yourself, *you will always be a prisoner to your relationship with her--and that's not mom's fault....* You will be constantly reacting to your dependency on her, rather than living life deliberately, autonomously, and according to your own values and directions." (205)

The authors insist on four "important commitments" in the process: Commitment of the entire process to God, commitment to a serious attempt at the growth process, verbal commitment to other people involved, and finally, a commitment to absolute truthfulness (47). Although our commitment to the Lord is vitally important, and He does promise to meet our needs, even to grant the *desires of our heart* (Psalm 37), the Bible doesn't focus our responsibilities around *self*.

One "responsibility" articulated in this book is to *respond* to the love offered by others:

"While it is important to have the right kind of mothering people around you, this is only part of the healing process. Your part is to respond to their love, truth, and support." (47)

"Take in the soothing, empathy, validation, thinking, and the other available jewels. Stop resisting love and grace when they show up." (79)

"...we need to take in the love that God and others offer us," not devaluing it or casting it off as insincere." (150)

This "response," claim the authors, must include a willingness to be open and vulnerable, to "feel" one's own feelings:

"If you did not attach to your mother, you may not be able to even feel needy, dependent emotions." (47)

However:

"Even if you can't 'feel' needs, you can be vulnerable with others about your own emptiness and incompleteness." (48)

"Be aware of your defenses...you have probably developed ways to hide from your needs." (49)

Note the focus: *your* needs, *your* emptiness, *your* feelings. The authors are more concerned about how you can get what you need rather than how you can *give* to others. "Allow dependent feelings" (48), they advise. In fact, they encourage you to "take the initiative," because "the loving feelings we experience don't come from the other person" (48). The reader is warned that:

"Many individuals go lonely and isolated for unwarranted lengths of time because they wait for others to notice that they are sad and struggling." (119)

The emphasis on emotion is particularly apparent, and distressing, in connection with the "trophy" mom's child. The authors state that often "the Trophy Mom refuses to let her child have negative feelings and admit losses and failures" (146). Thus, they recommend that you "process" such negative feelings and losses (146). They teach that you must "get in touch with the pain of your lost real self" in order to "bring the real self and the ideal self together" (147). Explaining the process further:

"Sometimes you feel great pain and injury because your real self was rejected. You must learn to embrace the pain and sadness and grieve your wish for her to accept you as you really are. You must process the hurt feelings so that you do not experience them in some other way in the present, transferring them onto significant others now, or turning them into clinical problems like depression or anxiety." (151)

Expression of anger, sadness, and the like is counseled.

Meanwhile, patience with *self* is highly recommended:

"Healing from our absent/detached mother issues is not an overnight process. A lot depends on when the injuries occurred and how severe they were, so you'll need to be patient with yourself as you begin to heal." (48)

Similarly, the authors elsewhere warn about the possibility of fear and resistance. They explain that:

"The real self has been alone and despised for a long time, and it will not come out of hiding without a fight." (150)

We could summarize the counsel of these authors: *Go out and get what you need!*

Autonomy and independence (primarily from mother) are goals for which the authors hold their counselees responsible, particularly those raised by "controlling" moms:

"You don't just have a mom who won't let you go, or a mom who makes you feel guilty. The real issue is that you have a personal character problem: You need to develop your identity and autonomy and learn how to set boundaries." (110)

The authors urge you to "develop a separate will" (112), explaining that:

"...the children of Controlling Moms often can't separate their feelings and values from those of the significant people in their lives: mom, spouse, or friends, for example... The process begins by first owning a 'no muscle.' *We can't really know who we are until we know who we aren't.*" (112)

This means that "they [children of "controlling" moms] must first become aware of their differences from mom before they can explore their own traits and characteristics" (112).

Setting boundaries is another area of emphasis:

"Boundaries are your personal property line. They define where you end and where others begin. Be clear about your limits, then state and keep the consequences if someone continues to transgress your boundaries." (119)

The authors also note the need to respect the boundaries of others:

"Learn to love and support others' no, even if you are disappointed or saddened by it." (120)

Respect for others is important, but the Bible doesn't express love in terms of "boundaries." There are times to respect the wishes of others, but also times to follow scriptural commands to confront sin even when another insists that you have crossed his "boundaries" wrongfully. Rather than honoring "boundaries," the Bible wants us to honor God's Word. *Sometimes* that means respecting the choices of others, but *other times* it involves the confrontation of sinful choices.

The move toward autonomy and separation is a process that involves an element of rebellion. "Challenging...involves rebelling against improper authorities," for example, if an employer asks you to do something illegal (161). The authors encourage you to challenge the continuing, "internalized" authority of your parents:

"Become aware of the messages that encourage you to remain a child. When you are able to challenge them, you can break the Still-the-Boss Mom's control over your head.... Listen to your support people, and internalize their 'you can' messages." (181)

The authors do note, correctly, that assuming one's proper role involves "giving up the wish to be our own idol and submitting to the appropriate overseers of life" (161). This is a good point. They also note the value of self-control:

"Rebellion is for teens. Adults discover value in exerting self-control.... When we feel like we are under the parent, we rebel against rules, even the ones we set for ourselves.... If you can get out from under the 'should' of the parental command, you can independently choose your own values." (179)

Unfortunately, there is insufficient warning about the dangers of autonomy and rebellion, in view of the *sinfulness* of human nature. There are illegitimate authorities to which we must not submit, as the authors do mention, and legitimate authorities God has ordained. Our inherent tendency, however, is toward sinful autonomy. The Bible doesn't encourage the free choice of "our own" values, but submission to God's values as revealed in Scripture. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5).

In the same vein, the authors mention proper submission to authority:

"As you learn to see yourself as equal to those in authority, you can submit to their authority without it meaning that you are less of a person than they are." (180)

Something is still missing! Besides the failure to acknowledge God's Word as the standard, the authors fail to note that God has ordained certain authority structures. In addition, nothing is said about the critical Creator-creature distinction. When we do submit to human authorities, it isn't so much with the view that you are not "less of a person," but rather, ultimately, to honor God's commandments. Far more caution is needed in this area of authority and rebellion, particularly, in recognizing the gravity of sin. *Much* more attention needs to be devoted to God's Word as the anchor, the standard by which all of our actions and thoughts are to be judged.

Besides autonomy, the authors stress the development of a separate *identity*:

"You need a sense of 'Who am I?' not only as distinct from others, but also as unique to yourself. You need to be able to make your own choices, in order to discover which ones define your unique personality and character." (114)

"Part of being a willing, autonomous person is the ability to know who you are--and aren't. Take ownership of this area by becoming aware of your own individual aspects and parts." (117)

Mixed in all of this, from time to time, is a brief statement that approaches the biblical view of responsibility for one's own actions:

"Not all choices are good choices, and we need to learn to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions, be they unwise, immoral, or illegal. We must honor life's boundaries and limits." (114)

More accurately, we must honor *God's* standards, not merely "life's boundaries." As for autonomy and identity, Scripture doesn't support the claims made by these authors. Certainly, we are not to blindly follow others, and God has given made us individual stewards of particular gifts and abilities. But we are not autonomous! We are each an integral part of the *body of Christ*, and we belong to *Him*. Our identity is not quite so "separate" as the authors suppose. As believers, we are all being conformed to the image of Christ, even while developing and using our individual gifts for His glory and the good of others. The

extreme individualism in this book conflicts with key biblical concepts.

The move toward independence, autonomy, and separateness is emphasized when the authors speak to those raised by "still-the-boss" mothers. Although "you may tend to gravitate toward those [other adults] who treat you like a child" (176), the authors encourage becoming "your own adult" rather than attempting to please and live under the demands of other adults as if they were parents:

"You don't have to let other adults parent you. But that requires the first step: *Get sick and tired of being sick and tired....* If you are living under the demands and expectations of all the 'mothers' in the world, feeling judged every time you don't do what they think you should, you are probably sick and tired." (175)

Cloud and Townsend warn against overly controlling "mentors" or "mother figures," encouraging the reader to seek out "safe" relationships:

"Be careful of the mentor who always want to be on top and looked up to, and who discourages your efforts to challenge or disagree with his ideas.... You need safe people who can provide the mothering you did not get and who will validate your adulthood." (176)

"Watch out for your tendencies to resist adulthood and freedom, to escape equality, and to return to the child position with your mother figures." (182)

The authors also ask that you reevaluate your beliefs. For some people, "their beliefs and values are the ones they inherited from mom...to be a true adult, equal to mom, your beliefs must be your own" (176). But the authors warn:

"Make sure they [your beliefs] are yours, even if they turn out to be the same as mom's...you may have to push yourself to voice your opinions when you're around authority figures." (177)

Some people "fear displeasing their mother figures and are always deferring to what they think," but "with the support of your new mothering friends, you can step out to make decisions on your own" (177). Biblically, we do need to use our God-given intellect and to carefully discern between truth and error. We don't blindly follow the opinions of other people. However, these authors fail to emphasize an absolutely crucial point. It's not "our own" opinions that count. Our exercise of discernment must look to

God's Word as the one eternal, absolute standard by which to evaluate the opinions of man--whether the beliefs of others or ourselves. It isn't thinking "our own" thoughts that matters, but rather taking every thought captive to Christ, thinking in accordance with *His* standards of truth.

Children of "still-the-boss" mothers are also counseled to "own" their sexuality. The authors explain that:

"Children are repressed sexually, adults are not. If you are still in the child position with mom, then you are probably suffering sexual consequences of some type.... Give yourself permission to be equal with your parents...many people feel guilty for assuming an adult position with their Still-the-Boss Moms." (178)

Again, the standard of Scripture is sadly absent. God doesn't counsel us to "own" our sexuality. He does exactly the opposite in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, telling us that we are *not our own*, but instead, our bodies belong to Him. Our sexuality is to be used in accordance with *His* standards, for *His* glory.

Discovery and use of talents is another area of discussion for adults children of "still-the-boss" moms:

"Discover your own talents, no matter what your mother figures think. If you are still under mom's thumb, fear of disapproval or failure may be hindering you from developing talents and giftedness.... As you begin to feel like a true adult, you can let go of your fear of doing it wrong and start to practice.... Risking, failing, and trying can be an exhilarating process, but those under an internal critical mom's judgment never know that joy." (179)

Use of God-given talents is a worthwhile endeavor, but the emphasis here is wrong. The point is not to escape the "internal critique" of earthly parents, but to *glorify God* and use our talents for His kingdom, including the edification of other believers. The authors focus on discarding the "pleasing mom" motivation, but they replace that motive with fundamentally self-centered concerns:

"When you feel like a child, you are often unable to serve; you feel that you are doing chores for mom.... When you feel free from having to give, you can give because you want to, and you are then validated as an adult and free forever from the Still-the-Boss Mom." (180)

Serving God (the *Father*) is the biblical motivation, not simply becoming "free forever" from the sinful patterns of a mother.

Advice is sprinkled throughout the book about how to relate to one's own children, spouse, and other relatives. Some biblical principles are embedded in this advice, although the Bible is not credited. The authors say to "cherish your spouse," by not comparing him/her unfavorably with mom or asking that spouse to take your side in an argument with mom. In other words, your spouse becomes a higher priority than your mother (208). In terms of the "leave and cleave" command given in Genesis, this is good counsel. If the problem concerns a mother-in-law, the authors urge that you settle matters directly rather than through your spouse:

"Instead of trying to convince your spouse to separate more from his mom, help him see that he isn't functioning as a spouse with you--no matter what the reason.... Secondly, work out your own relationship with your mother-in-law. If she is critical of you, don't ask your spouse for protection; call her and work it out." (216)

Biblically, we are indeed encouraged to settle differences directly, confessing and confronting sin as appropriate.

In relationships with one's own children, the authors warn that "...you can easily become paralyzed with guilt and anxiety, fearing that your character deficits will ruin your child" (225). They suggest that you "stay in the light of relationship." This involves:

"...making yourself vulnerable and accountable to others who can help you see blindspots in your mothering and support you as you change hurtful ways.... Resist the tendency to hide your weaknesses because of shame or guilt and to try to work them out all alone." (227)

These quotes come from a chapter entitled "To Women Only." Instead of looking to God (first), husband/father, and the church, the authors send you to a vaguely defined group of "others." And again, they fail to cite God's Word as the standard for mothering, the answer to fears, guilt, and anxiety about this very important human relationship.

When speaking to men, the authors claim that a man who has not "left home" will continue to have "control and security issues," having not established his "own sense of adulthood" (241). Thus he will look to women, *rather than to self*, to meet his needs:

"When it comes to security, you probably still look to women to provide basic security instead of feeling secure in yourself." (242)

This must sound like a broken record by now, but this emphasis on self-responsibility as primarily a quest for unmet needs...finds no support in Scripture! Rather, God has promised to *supply all of our needs in Christ Jesus, according to His riches in glory* (Philippians 4:19).

Acceptance, both of self and others, is yet another responsibility the authors place on the adult child:

"Adult children of Trophy Moms can have a deep disdain for imperfection in others, which they learned from their mother. They may act nice and accommodating on the outside, but their deep contempt for others' imperfections can block true intimacy and community. In the context of real people and good mothering, however, these people can learn to accept others as well as themselves." (147)

There is brief attention, on occasion, to biblical truth. In discussing the "phantom" mom, the authors recommend spending time with God and His Word, rather than becoming overly involved in being busy and productive (49). In the "china doll" section, the development of a suggested "action plan" includes "building more support," reading, Bible study, or confrontation (79). This particular list is a mixed bag! In a list of recommendations for those raised by "trophy" moms, prayer is *tenth* in line:

"The search for the real self is ultimately a spiritual one.... In prayer, we can ask God to reveal our real selves to us and to give us the courage to embrace who we are and the strength to live out of our real selves." (149-150)

It may seem encouraging that a few semi-biblical suggestions are scattered throughout the book. However, placing prayer in *tenth* position is hardly the correct biblical priority. Further, asking God to "reveal our real self" and for the "courage to embrace who we are" is not grounded in any scriptural model of prayer. Compare this with biblical admonitions to confess sin, give adoration and glory to God, intercede on behalf of others, and thank God for His many blessings. This extremely self-centered prayer mode finds no support in the Bible. Yes, we are to bring our requests to God, but not with this type of self-seeking, self-embracing attitude.

Responsibilities of the "support group." Throughout the book, these authors assume that *psychological needs not originally*

met by one's mother must now be met by others. Here is how the authors describe what occurred in one of their therapy groups:

"As they held him accountable for his own fears and deficits, as well as gave him what he missed with his own mother; he began to notice that he avoided intimacy less" (14, emphasis in original).

Nevertheless, according to Cloud and Townsend:

"Many people suffer under the delusion that their mother is the real problem." (15)

Perhaps these authors are suffering under such a delusion! They claim to reject the approach of "modern pop psychology," which includes blaming, catharsis cures, victim mentality, excusing of behavior, living in the past, and arranging meetings with mom to "own" her past failures (15). They claim that all of this "focuses on the mother of the past, not on the process of mothering in the present" (15). But...do they truly reject such approaches? By concentrating on getting "unmet needs" of the past met in the present, are they not engaging in a type of "living in the past"? The claim is stated as otherwise:

"When we talk about 'dealing with the past,' we aren't saying to 'go back into the past.'" (15)

Oh really? Immediately, the authors claim that "she [your mother] lives with you every day in the present" (15). By focusing on unmet mothering needs in the present, these psychologists are "going back into the past" through the back door. Here is their thesis again:

"Our aim here is to help you understand that you may not have received everything you needed from your mother, and **only when someone gives you those ingredients can your life work correctly.**" (20, emphasis added)

Is it really so essential that someone meet these claimed psychological "needs" before your life can "work correctly"? Is godly living so dependent on predefined needs being met? The authors continually insist that "we must get from others what we did not get completely from our mother" (20). This is a bold statement. Is it true? We will look closely at the assumptions on which this book is predicated, and the crucial role of the "support group," with its "safe people." Somewhere this nebulous group manages to replace the role God has given to His church, His people. Not only that--these authors have very little to say about how the *father* fits into the picture. In this scenario, it is all too easy to replace both church and family with a therapy

group, where the values of modern psychology, instead of God's revealed standards, define relationships. For example:

"Mothering injuries, at heart, are relational injuries. That is, the deficits were caused by the most significant connection in our lives. And, just as a relationship can break a person, a relationship can also restore a person."
(41)

(This *isn't* living in the past?) In addition to their emphasis on "receiving what we missed out on the first time around," the authors insist that "we *did* receive something the first time around, and if it was hurtful, we need to deal with it" (80).
(This *isn't* living in the past?)

In moving toward solutions, the authors ask:

"What do we who have unintegrated feelings, impulses, and parts of ourselves need, and how do we get it?" (72)

Their solution is to start over, first establishing a relationship with God:

"We *do* have to start over, but it can't be with mother. We start over when we enter a relationship with God through Jesus and then mature through the spiritual growth process. This is where we are restored to mothering." (73)

At least God is *mentioned*, but most of the emphasis throughout the book is on what we can get from others, i.e., how we can get our "unmet needs" met through others. While not suggesting that any person is to be isolated from other people, the *focus* of this book is entirely unbiblical. The body of Christ does supply relationships wherein people edify and care for one another in a mutual ministry. However, setting out to *get your needs met*, rather than to serve God and others, is to head out in the wrong direction. He who seeks his own life, in the end, will lose it.

The authors recommend that you "find a safe place" in order to "come out of the world of your own head and experience" (78). "Safe places" include support or therapy groups, individual counseling, Bible studies "where you can process your feelings and experiences" (what happened to actual *Bible study*?), or an "open, relational church" (78). The authors suggest "healthy" churches (does this perhaps mean churches that encourage psychotherapy?), recovery or support groups, and therapists as "the best sources to fill up this empty part of yourself" (43). They warn against the "wrong" sort of churches and people:

"If you are a detached person, warmth and empathy may be difficult for you.... You might find it easier to connect to

another distant person, a critical parental figure, or some information-laden type, or you might find a **legalistic church** to provide you with a sense of structure away from your feelings. This may feel safer and more familiar to you, but it won't solve your problem." (44, emphasis added)

The authors warn, however, that "your mothering environment also needs to be *nonintrusive*" because sometimes the problem mom was both detached and intrusive:

"This kind of mom didn't connect with her children but forced her needs, thoughts, and feelings onto them in the guise of relationship. It was her way of controlling them." (44)

There are further warnings concerning "overzealous, smothering-type people" who may "make the situation worse for attachment-injured people" (45). Instead, a mutual dependence is suggested, because "these early parts of yourself *need to need*" (45).

Honesty is another quality to seek out in new "mothering" people:

"Your mothering people must be scrupulously honest in character. They must be able to tell the truth about themselves and about you." (46)

This "honesty" has nothing to do with biblical confrontation, but rather--you guessed it--with *getting your needs met*:

"You may be so disconnected from yourself at times that you are unaware of your needs and desires, your hiding patterns and defenses. Your new mothers need to confront you with these realities and help you see what's going on." (46)

In these new "mothering" relationships, the authors explain that the "level of responsibility" differs from your original mothering experience:

"As grown-ups, when we enter remothering relationships, we don't allow someone else to take over responsibility for our life." (46)

True, but "responsibility" for these authors revolves around *getting your needs met*, not conforming to God's standards. The authors warn against minimizing your needs (49), being overly independent to "protect yourself against the 'needy little child' inside" (50), and avoidance of intimacy when the opportunity arises. This emphasis on needs emerges over and over:

"...try to remember that God has built you to depend on him and other people.... When we fail to express our needs, we remain islands unto ourselves--detached, alone, arrogant, and proud." (49)

We're not islands, of course, but Scripture exhorts us to serve God and others, not travel down a one-way path where *getting your needs met* is the crucial goal. From the perspective of this book, other people are there to *meet your needs*, and relationships are entered into for the purpose of *getting your needs met*.

Finally, having at last found your "safe" place with "safe" people, the authors ask you "to talk, to open up, to share, and to allow others into the immediate experience of your overwhelming emotional states," explaining that "you need to experience mothering to internalize it" (78).

Different mothering "needs" are discussed for each of the six moms. For those raised by the "china doll" mom:

"If you had a fragile mother in real life, you are still in need of containment. You need soothing, and structuring, and you can get this from other people in your life and from God.... And you have to learn to receive what is given as well." (87)

For the child of a "controlling" mom, the authors caution that:

"...it takes a unique sort of person to help you form your separate identity...so much of your work has to do with 'not me' issues...your need to become your own person is tied up in the need to differentiate yourself from others.... Your supportive people need to be able to be emotionally close...to discuss painful issues, talk about their own feelings...to *stay connected to you even in conflict*." (110-111)

They also need to give "truthful feedback" so that you can "develop yourself, your own needs and values, and your own boundaries" (111). In addition to all of this, "you need people who will give you *time to grow*" (111):

"They should be process-oriented; they expect growth to take time and to involve repeated failures." (112)

Frustration of the desire to be parented is yet another quality the authors seek in the adult child's support system:

"Many people have difficulty distinguishing love from caretaking.... Thus, when someone fails to rescue them from

irresponsibility, they feel unloved. Your supportive network will help you grow through this issue. They are there to frustrate your wish to be parented and to help you learn to say no to that wish within yourself." (116)

Interesting that the "desire to be parented" is to be frustrated while seeking to meet unmet mothering needs!

The support process for the "trophy" mother's children is described in terms of a funeral. The authors refer to the sadness that occurs, when people acknowledge what is most difficult to accept about themselves, as a "funeral" (143). At the same time, they see relief available in a community atmosphere, in the realization that our struggles are not alone (144). When people acknowledge the reality of their failures in a group:

"This is what a good funeral is supposed to look like. When someone dies or we lose something, the mourners come together and comfort one another." (144)

This "funeral" arrangement is supposedly necessary for "trophy" children:

"This death is the key to overcoming the effects of the Trophy Mom. The first step is to see that our symptoms are **caused by** trying to live up to the demands of the trophy." (144, emphasis added)

(This isn't living in the past?) Then:

"Once we realize we are not going to make it back to Eden, we must find a safe community who will support us through the funeral. We need the kind of mothering spoken of in the last chapter--people who will *accept and correct*." (144)

The authors recommend several key qualities in a support group, including humility, the absence of either condemnation or denial, the ability to confront, and mutual acceptance (145). They warn against seeking out people who make demands similar to the "trophy mom," or those who are "too comfortable with their imperfections" and thus "unable to confront us with the problems we need to look at" (145). For those raised by "trophy" mothers, the authors urge joining a support group where it is possible to "confess your faults" (James 5:15) to one another, finding both acceptance and truth (146). Looking at the original biblical languages, here is how these authors interpret the passage to support their theories:

"The Greek word that is translated 'faults' here in the book of James is one that encompasses both our willful transgressions and our unintentional ones.... The Greek word

for *confess* means to 'agree.' We simply need to agree with the reality and the truth of who we really are." (146)

The original word here is *hamartia*, normally translated *sin*. Looking at the use of this word in the New Testament, and specifically in James (1:13-14, 2:9), the authors are stretching a point by insisting that it covers unintentional transgressions. It is this *sin* for which Christ died, while we were yet *sinners* (Romans 5:8, using the same Greek root). Confession does involve agreement, but as that term is normally used in Scripture, it involves confession of *sin* so that we might be forgiven and cleansed (1 John 1:9). One of the problems with modern support groups, such as these authors advocate, is that sins are "confessed" too freely, to those who are not involved and were not sinned against. Biblically, we are to confess to God and to those we have sinned against, not a support group.

Children of "trophy" mothers are also urged to locate people who will simply accept them without making them into "trophies":

"You need good mothering from somewhere to be the person God created you to be.... **Find the mothering you need.** Get with people who do not need you to be their trophy." (156, emphasis added)

Note, as always, this continuing focus on getting your needs met.

For those from a home ruled by "still-the-boss" mom, the authors recommend finding a "safe place with people who support your growing up," awareness of your behavior patterns, "working through" your feelings with "safe" people, and challenging the "internalized messages" from your "still-the-boss" mom (181).

The grown "American Express" child is told to look beyond parents for truth as well as relationships:

"We need teaching and information from sources other than our parents. When we learn to use the community to meet our needs for relationship and truth, we can then be grounded wherever we find ourselves in life." (193)

What happened to the church here? Where is the *covenant community*, God's people? The authors rarely mention the church, and when they do, their focus is on finding a church that is "healthy" by their psychological standards. What about finding a church that faithfully preaches the gospel, administers the sacraments, and exercises biblical discipline?

Besides seeking truth and relationship outside the home, "American Express" children are cautioned about breaking the ties too quickly:

"No matter how motivated, miserable, or mad you are at your situation with mom, don't even think about leaving your American Express connection until you have created, developed, and stabilized your own emotional home base. In other words, cement your re-mothering relationships...make sure you are deeply rooted and grounded within these connections." (205)

The supportive relationships in these cases are supposed to assist you in sorting out different types of anger:

"You may experience two types of anger at the American Express Mom: *intrusion anger* and *wish disappointment*. Use your supportive remothering relationships to separate the two.... The first anger is useful for you and your mom, and the second is reserved for you alone.... Intrusion anger is the irritation you may feel at mom's violation of your space.... Wish disappointment occurs when we hold on to old desires for mom to be someone she never was, or someone she used to be.... This type of anger isn't the kind to share with mom. It's based on early needs and hurts that now belong to your support group." (215)

The "support group" replaces the role of God's people, the church, in this entire book. The group is relied upon as a source to "get your needs met," rather than the mutual care, fellowship, and service that we see in the Scripture. The standards of care are found in psychological teachings rather than God's teachings. Where does the Bible exhort us to separate different types of anger, one to be shared solely with a group of people not involved in the original offense? It doesn't.

One of the closing chapters is addressed specifically to men. The theme of the book, *getting unmet needs met*, is reiterated in no uncertain terms, this time "for men only":

"If you are not finished with mothering, you are going to have problems." (242)

"The problem is ultimately one of *regression*. If you are not finished with mom or mothering, every woman becomes a potential mother or mother figure." (243)

Therefore, the authors say, *go ahead and get your needs met*, but be careful how you go about it:

"So watch for how you turn adult relationships into childhood struggles or attempts to get childhood needs met. They can be met, but both parties must understand that this is a part of the relationship.... Make sure you own and directly express your needs rather than act them out." (243)

Whatever happened to the biblical admonition to husbands, to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5)? How does this square with men seeking out women to meet their unmet "mothering needs," so long as both parties agree? It simply doesn't. The authors explain the man's predicament by seeking explanations in the past (a place where they weren't going to go):

"Men are designed to identify with dad for gender and sex role identification, so that they might separate from their mothers. But if dad is unavailable, they are left fused with mom, in conflict with her, or pulled into the spouse position in some sick way." (246)

Where does the Bible explain the sinful behavior of men in such terms? It never does. The chapter to men ends on the same old theme:

"Men, there is only one way to summarize all of this--grow up.... **If you can get the mothering you need**, work out the issues with your real mom, leave the dependent stance, and return to women as equals, you will find true fulfillment at the end of your journey." (247, emphasis added)

Meanwhile, a similar chapter is addressed to "women only." This is one of the rare places in the entire book where the father's role in the family is acknowledged. Unfortunately, nothing biblical emerges. Rather than seeing the father as the biblical head of the home, he is seen as a tool for the separation of mother and daughter:

"Father functions as a sort of wedge between the early ultra-closeness between child and mom when the child is ready to separate more.... Girls have a disadvantage here as they learn to separate and develop their own identity. Boys are moving from someone unlike them toward someone very much like them.... Girls, however, are moving from someone feminine and warm to someone a little scary and intimidating." (220)

Later, the authors caution that "mother issues" are often disguised as "father issues" instead:

"...picking bad men isn't always due to having a bad dad, and having a distant father doesn't always create depression." (223)

The authors believe it is too simplistic to claim that "all attachment problems are mom problems and that all aggression problems are dad problems" (223). Problems with choosing men may be "two dynamics" -- "the mother who couldn't let go and the father who couldn't make his little girl feel special" (224). (Better to blame two parents than one!) Note how the father's place in the home is minimized, and nothing is said about his biblical responsibility for leadership and godly instruction.

Finally, the authors engage in verbal gymnastics to justify their get-your-needs-met approach as *not* inherently self-centered:

"*You can't give what you have never received. But you can give liberally when you've humbly internalized love and structure from God and his people: 'We love because he first loved us.'* It's not selfish, then, to work on your own character issues." (226)

People do have needs, and the intent here is not to deny that reality or to suggest that each person become a self-sufficient island. But *God has promised to supply all of our needs in Christ Jesus, according to His riches in glory* (Philippians 4:19). To embark on a project of "remothering," meeting needs supposedly not met in childhood, is to usurp a role God has reserved for Himself.

Where Do We Go From Here? Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Relationships

The authors place importance, and rightly so, on developing a good relationship with your mother regardless of the past:

"It is a sign of health when you can have a good relationship with your mother. In fact, it is essential to the survival of society, values, culture, and growth for multigenerational ties to exist." (201)

Each "mom" analysis includes considerable discussion of how to handle current relationships. After looking at each of these, we will conclude our evaluation by examining how the authors deal with the important matters of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Phantom Mom. The authors recommend the very careful initiation of a new relationship:

"You can't reparent her or take responsibility for her response, but you can move toward her. This might mean

vulnerably reaching out to her, saying you'd like a closer friendship in your adult years.... This is a complex decision...some Phantom Moms are so toxic and destructive that any attempt at vulnerability prematurely (or at all, in some cases) can undo a lot of hard work." (51)

Note the emphasis on how "a lot of hard work" (presumably in therapy) might be undone. The focus remains primarily on self:

"You may need to tell her you'll have to restrict contact with her if she persists in certain hurtful behaviors. Tell her specifically which things hurt you and your family and what you'd like her to do instead. And then give her a chance to change. Setting boundaries with the absent or detached mother may be hard, but it may waken her out of her self-absorption, and she may realize that her behavior has consequences." (52)

If your efforts fail:

"If mom isn't interested in a deeper, safer relationship and wants to remain disconnected and shallow, you need to respect her limitations and face reality...we must grieve our ideal of the mom that never was and probably never will be. However, you can only let go of that wish when you are filled and connected in your remothering relationships." (53)

Even if your attempts to connect are successful, the authors retain their primary emphasis on protection of self and remaining *separate*:

"If this connection [a mutual friendship] occurs, it's important that you and your mom keep your own separate 'families,' in the spiritual and emotional sense." (53)

It's true that sinful behaviors require confrontation, and the authors are at least willing to advise attempts at relationship. However, the *emphasis* is disturbing in that *self* is always at the center: *protect* self from further harm, *separate* self from parents, and *grieve* the losses of self.

China Doll Mom. As for current relationships with this type of mother, the authors warn that adult children may assume "protective and parenting roles...unable to separate the fragility of the declining years from mom's characteristic resistance to taking ownership of her life" (68). They recommend becoming aware of "the automatic patterns that belong specifically to our relationship with our mother" (81).

Self-protection seems to be the primary goal when adult children attempt to relate to "china doll" mothers. The authors insist that you *must get your needs met first*, and then perhaps from this stronger position it will be possible to relate to mother:

"This position of strength can only come from possessing whatever it is that we needed from her [mother]. We cannot let go of mother if we are still needing something from her. This is why we emphasize getting the containing that you need from others *first*." (81)

"The essence of an adult relationship with a fragile mom is this: *If she cannot contain feelings, then relate to her in a way that she can handle. Take your need to be soothed and validated somewhere else. Do not continue wanting what she can't give.*" (84)

Although this last sentence may seem reasonable, and begins to move away from self-absorption, the emphasis remains on how to *protect self* in the relationship:

"If mom is unable to soothe, understand, empathize, and do all the other aspects of containing, do not expose your fragile parts to her. Set some limits on both yourself and your mother.... If you have a mom who is unable to do anything but hurt you, **limit your vulnerability** when you're with her." (85, emphasis added)

"If you are not strong enough to deal with her, that's okay. Simply end the conversation, and call a supportive friend who can provide what you need. There is **no value in your getting injured again and again.**" (86, emphasis added)

"If you had a fragile mother in real life, you are still in need of containment. **You need** soothing, and structuring, and **you can get this from** other people in your life and from God.... And you have to learn to receive what is given as well." (87, emphasis added)

Again and again, these authors place their central focus on *self*, on how to *get your needs met* rather than on serving Christ.

Controlling Mom. "The Controlling Mom may be the hardest mother type to perceive accurately and realistically" (109). The authors describe two tendencies--to see the mother as the solution, because she can be loving and supportive as well as controlling (109), or to view her as the problem because of her excessive control (110). They recommend setting limits with such

mothers, "new ground rules" for your relationship, such as leaving the house if she yells when you disagree with her (121). Some minor matters may perhaps be overlooked:

"Confront on matters of principle, and don't worry so much about the details. You don't see mom every day anymore, and you can tolerate the unimportant things." (122)

It may or may not be possible to achieve a good relationship with this type of mother:

"A great deal depends on mom's willingness to look at herself. If she is able to, you may have gained a friend. If not, she'll react defensively. In any case, you've done your part to improve your relationships, and you may simply have to leave it at that." (122)

The authors also recommend helping your mother with her own limits by sharing what you've learned about "boundaries."

"Mom may have difficulty being an individual in her own life. While you aren't her counselor, you can assist her in this area." (123)

There's nothing here about *biblical* principles of relationship. As with the other mothers, the emphasis remains on separation, on setting "boundaries," rather than on following God's commands. Rather than "sharing what you've learned about boundaries," how about sharing what you've learned about how to live a life that pleases God?

Trophy Mom. Once again, the emphasis rests on *getting your needs met*:

"She has power over you in the present to the degree to which you still need her acceptance. But when you grieve that wish for her acceptance and get that mothering from your safe people, you can begin to love her better because you do not need anything from her anymore." (153)

The authors suggest that it may be possible to talk things out with your "trophy mom," in order to achieve greater intimacy in your present relationship (154). However, "chances are if she is a true Trophy Mom, she will have difficulty hearing any negatives" (154). If she refuses to "own" her side, the relationship may have to be more on the surface level (154). If she refuses to talk, limits may need to be set, to *protect self*:

"Only you know how much contact is too much. I have seen adult children in very bad situations who cannot even talk to their mothers at all for awhile." (154)

The authors briefly admit that cutting off contact is an extreme solution:

"To some people this may sound very extreme, but some mothers are so hurtful and the adult child so injured that just to make a phone call can cause the adult child to have a suicidal crisis.... It's sad to have to enforce limits, but sometimes you have to for the sake of the grandchildren, your marriage, or your sanity. Sometimes setting limits may help your mother see how she is hurting you." (155)

Did it ever occur to these authors that the suicidal person might need to be counseled about *his own* sinful acts and motives? There's no intent here to lack compassion. It *can* be difficult and painful for anyone who has been grievously sinned against. But the *solution* to that affliction is not to be found in the theories and practices of modern psychology, which only tend to add injury to injury. If there is sin being committed against your own children, as the authors quickly mention, then *that* sin needs to be confronted in love for the sake of all concerned.

Finally, the authors twist Scripture to support their self-first type of love:

"Love covers a multitude of sins.... Love your Trophy Mom as best you can, but not in the ways that the trophy demands-- you are finished with that. You are not trying to get something from her anymore. You are getting your acceptance from somewhere else." (156)

The Bible doesn't tell us that we must rush out to *get our needs met* first, before we can obey God's commands to love Him and others. God *does* promise to meet our true needs, but He doesn't tell us to do this for ourselves as a prerequisite to following biblical admonitions.

Still-the-Boss Mom. Current relationships with this type of mother may involve regression when in her presence, continued anxious attempts to please her, or a stormy relationship characterized by rebellion, defiance, and opposition (171).

The authors want to distinguish between the "controlling" mom and the "still-the-boss" mom, and the problems revolving around each:

"As an adult, you must become 'your own person' and become 'an equal with other adults'.... The first task is discovering how you are separate and different from your mother, and the second moves past that to the place of becoming equal with her. You are both adults, and neither has the right to judge the other." (173)

With a "still-the-boss" mother, these authors insist that you forcefully take control of your own life:

"But whether or not your Still-the-Boss Mom recognizes it, you are the one in control of your own life now.... You could enter into some conflict as you work out your new relationship.... Talk to her about the issues; you want to make your own decisions, be treated as an adult, be free from worry that she might be upset or judgmental if you decide something different from what she would have decided, and anything else that will help you feel more like an adult in the relationship." (183)

The goal, for these authors, is "to preserve both your adulthood and your friendship with mom" (184). Some of their recommendations here are reasonable and involve basic honesty and responsibility. But many situations, the authors warn, do not work out well with Still-the-Boss mothers:

"Some Still-the-Boss Moms just refuse to respect their adult children as equals and want to continue to dominate and rule them to varying degrees.... In the not-so-good scenario, the goal is to preserve your adulthood and act responsibly to mom." (185)

If this is the case, they claim that you must "grieve" your desire to be treated as an equal and "talk it out" with a support group:

"To hold on to your wish for her to treat you like an adult will keep you in the child position forever and always frustrated as well.... Do not allow her to gain control by your intense wish for her to be different." (185)

One method of allowing her to "gain control" is an angry or guilt-ridden response:

"Do not respond in anger.... If she can still get to you, you need to work on your 'walls.' You need stronger internal boundaries.... Do not respond out of guilt, either.... Guilt is the other side of anger. They are both indicators that you do not feel equal to mom and others." (186)

Rather than responding in biblical love, with an emphasis on the welfare of the other person, the authors advocate assertion of *self*:

"Feel free to disagree.... Be direct and assertive, and when she shows her disapproval, empathize with her." (186)

Protection of *self* is also advocated, just as it is in discussions of other mothering types:

"Set limits on yourself. You might still be too injured to interact in these ways just yet.... You might need more space for awhile to recover and get through whatever it is that you are dealing with... Set limits with mom. Sometimes relationships are so abusive and hurtful that no one is helped by ongoing interaction." (186-187)

Getting your own needs met, again, is prominent in the discussion:

"Use your support system.... Lean on your support system. Call them before and after an interaction that frazzles you." (187)

As for relating to "still-the-boss" mom, the authors' recommendations are a mixed bag:

"Relate to mom's strengths. Maybe she cannot be a friend. But there may be times and ways where her need to parent can be okay with you.... Above all, love your mom. The adult position is one of love.... Honor her as mom, love her as you do yourself, and be in charge of your own life." (187-188)

At least the biblical commands to *love* and *honor* are included. But *God* is in charge of your life.

American Express mom. The authors recommend accepting the counsel of friends, explaining that "becoming answerable to your support relationships is key to creating your own home" (206). *They fail to mention the role of the church in accountability.*

"When we keep good friends politely at arm's length, we are actually protecting our enabling relationship with mom." (207)

The authors seem to affirm personal responsibility when they proceed to say:

"Next, begin to develop a sense of 'no excuses ownership' over your successes and failures. Children of American Express Moms are often blamers and rationalizers." (207)

The authors suggest that you "bring mom in on the process" if at all possible, noting that "she may be fully supportive of your being on your own" (208).

There may also be financial problems for adult children of "American Express" mothers:

"If you haven't yet become autonomous, there's probably a money symptom somewhere: help during tax time, luxury expenses, emergencies, privileges the kids couldn't have otherwise, and others. Take hold of your finances and learn to live within your means.... If you do find it necessary to borrow from her [mother], treat her as you would a bank, with all the protection and benefits due the lender." (209)

The authors say to "receive favors, not needs" from mom, i.e., little "extras" rather than items you need to budget for (212). They suggest that you "take charge of your own self-development" and begin a friendship with your mother that is based on the equality between two adults (211). Some of what they recommend seems reasonable and designed to encourage biblical love:

"How can you make a return to mom? As she ages and slows down, she will need emotional and functional assistance.... By making a return to mom, you are taking your place in the seat of the adult and letting her move on to her golden years of less demands and responsibility. You are behaving according to the principles God has set up for us." (212)

However, there is concern expressed about the child's assuming *too much* responsibility for mom's welfare:

"Many adults feel obligated to be the total support system for mom in her failing years. They feel they should be her confidant, best friend, and advice giver on all her medical, emotional, and social issues.... These adult children alternate between feelings of obligation, guilt, and resentment." (213-214)

The "American Express" mother may have excessive expectancies of her adult children:

"The problem with the American Express Mom is that, while she may have social relationships, her dependencies often lie with her children. She may see her kids as her emotional retirement fund." (214)

There are some serious issues here that deserve more attention than can be given in this short space. Adult children do have some biblical responsibilities to aging parents as well as to their own spouses and children. The problem with *this* book is in its heavy emphasis on *getting your needs met* as well as *self-protection*, rather than trusting God in these matters.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are two key biblical issues in our relationships with others, including parents. Both are discussed periodically throughout the book, and the authors consider them important. Unfortunately, their understanding is not consistent with Scripture.

Forgiveness is defined by these authors in terms of unresolved feelings:

"If we have unresolved feelings toward our real mothers, we need to deal with that relationship. The Bible calls this process forgiveness." (17)

No it doesn't! Forgiveness is a gracious response to the sin of another, not a psychotherapeutic process to "deal with" feelings. Meanwhile, the authors see all of the following as part of forgiveness: "looking honestly at problems in a relationship, facing them, letting them go, and grieving our losses" (17).

As in most modern psychology texts, forgiveness is seen primarily in terms of benefits to the one who forgives:

"It [forgiveness] frees us from our past." (17)

"Forgive.... Let mom off the hook, and then both of you can be free of the past that haunts you and keeps you down." (182)

"Forgiveness frees us from bitterness, anger, rage, hatred, and many other destructive emotions. Hating someone for what he or she did or did not do in the past keeps the injury very much alive in the present. This does not mean that we deny what happened. A period of 'appropriate blame' is necessary for us to see reality." (83) [This *isn't* living in the past?]

"Forgiving the Trophy Mom is the same as the cure, and not forgiving her is the same as the sickness." (152)

Thus forgiveness, the authors state, doesn't mean denial of what really happened, nor does it mean that all anger and sadness

instantly disappears (153). "Staying in touch with the hurt," they say, is normal.

The need for children to learn about forgiveness is mentioned at several points. Mothers, claim the authors, can forgive "parts" of a child and demonstrate how to remain "connected" in spite of hurt:

"Many of a child's parts need a mom's forgiveness... Children are unable to understand how they can hurt others and still be connected. Mother becomes a model for the forgiveness process." (131)

Mothers can also ask forgiveness and be willing to acknowledge their own mistakes:

"You provide the opportunity for reconciliation. Your child needs to know that conflicts with you can be resolved.... You model ownership and forgiveness. Your child also gains the advantage of seeing how a grown-up takes responsibility for her problems and asks forgiveness from those they've hurt." (229)

The authors describe their theories about how a child is taught forgiveness:

"Children have a remarkable ability to forgive if you present the problem to them in a way they can understand.... If their needs are met and their feelings are not minimized by a defensive mom, they don't take long to grieve the pain she causes them and move on to more growth." (229)

They believe that forgiveness should be contrasted with the "denial" that supposedly occurs in many homes:

"...children of confessing moms are able to bear and tolerate many other weaknesses in her.... People who come from high-functioning but in-denial parents tend to function worse than those who had more dysfunctional but confessing parents.... From an honest mom she learns that even painful truths are better than secrets and hiding in her own life. She'll learn that reality is her friend." (230)

There is a real mixture here of truth and error. Parents do need to acknowledge their own sins and at times ask forgiveness of their children. Forgiveness does involve an honest recognition that sin has occurred. However, biblically, forgiveness is not merely "dealing with" feelings, nor is its purpose to "heal the hurt" of the one who was offended. Its purpose is primarily for the benefit of *the offender*. Our forgiveness is to be modeled on

God's forgiveness of us in Christ, which is gracious, kind, and tender hearted, not counting our sins against us. God doesn't forgive us in order to "heal" His hurt, but for His ultimate glory and for our sake, to reconcile us to Himself. The self-centered forgiveness of modern psychology is in diametrical opposition to God's grace and mercy.

Reconciliation. The *intent* of the book is summarized as reconciliation:

"When people are reconciled, they are restored to those from whom they were alienated and they are able to reconnect."
(249)

Reconciliation with mother, the authors claim, involves getting your "unmet needs met by other people," then moving into "a mutual friendship with mom" (250). There is also what they call "reconciliation within yourself" (250). The authors claim that "you need to deal with any alienation within your own character" (250). This involves "healing" childhood hurts, "accepting realities of the past," and "giving up your own desires and wishes for that which can never be" (250). Next, "reconciliation with your safe relationships" involves remaining connected to "remothering people" (250) who "will help you finish what was undone or injured in the past" (251).

Reconciliation with God is noted last. "God is the one who can't be proven, but is always there" (251). (Yes He can be proven! However, that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.) The gospel is mentioned only in the briefest terms, at the very close of the book. The authors misunderstand, however, when they say that:

"If you're a Christian who is alienated from God, we urge you to reconnect with him and his love." (251)

A Christian, *by definition*, is *not* alienated from God, although believers may not always "feel" close to God and may fall into sin for a time. The Christian is also, *by definition*, reconciled to God in Christ, because God took the initiative in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

Biblically, reconciliation with God comes *first*, not last. Reconciliation with others is not predicated on *getting our needs met* first, although God does promise to supply all of our needs. Rather, reconciliation with others is *commanded*. Reconciliation with *self* is an unbiblical concept that deserves no place in a book professing to be Christian.

Conclusion

Speaking of the Garden of Eden, the authors say:

"In this story, we find a sad truth: We have lost Paradise, and the door to the garden, where things are perfect, is guarded. We are unable to enter into perfection. We are unable to be perfect, to have perfect people in our lives, and to experience a perfect world." (143)

In their concluding words to women, they return to Eden:

"Remember, you are a part of the legacy of Eve, who is the grounding and source of nurturance for all of us.... As you become the woman God intended you to be, you redeem the mothering you received, and you redemptively pour out your own love onto the world." (231)

It is true that we live in a sinful world. Sin entered the world, and death with it, when the first man, Adam, transgressed God's commandment. However, while the authors rightly recognize the reality of sin, much of their analysis reveals a weak view of the nature of sin. The first above quote, however, fails to recognize the heavenly hope promised to believers, along with the hope of *sanctification* in this life, through the work of the Spirit and Word of God. The second quote is defective, in that Scripture nowhere claims that Eve is the "grounding and source of nurturance for all of us." *Christ* is the one who supplies all of our needs. Believers are rooted and grounded in the love of *Christ*, not Eve. Although Christians may give love to others, you cannot "redemptively pour out your love onto the world." Only Jesus Christ can do that. And God has promised to supply *all of our needs* according to the riches of His grace in *Christ Jesus*.

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